

THE HELLENIC ORIGINS OF  
CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM

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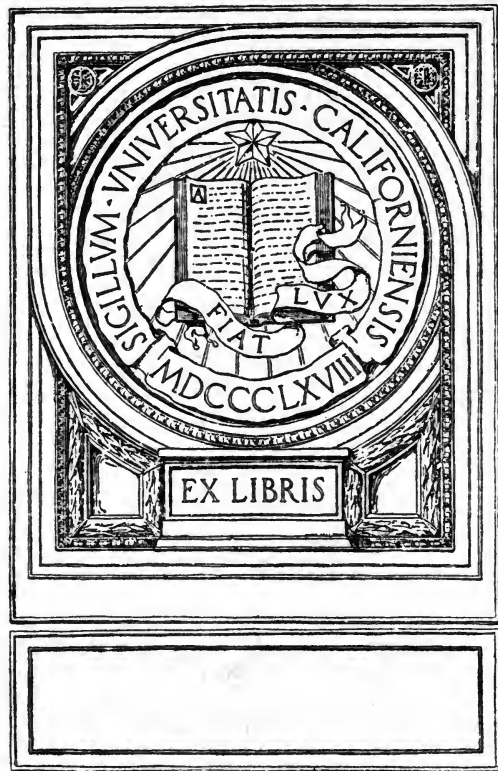
JOSEPH WARD SWAIN, A.M.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK

1916

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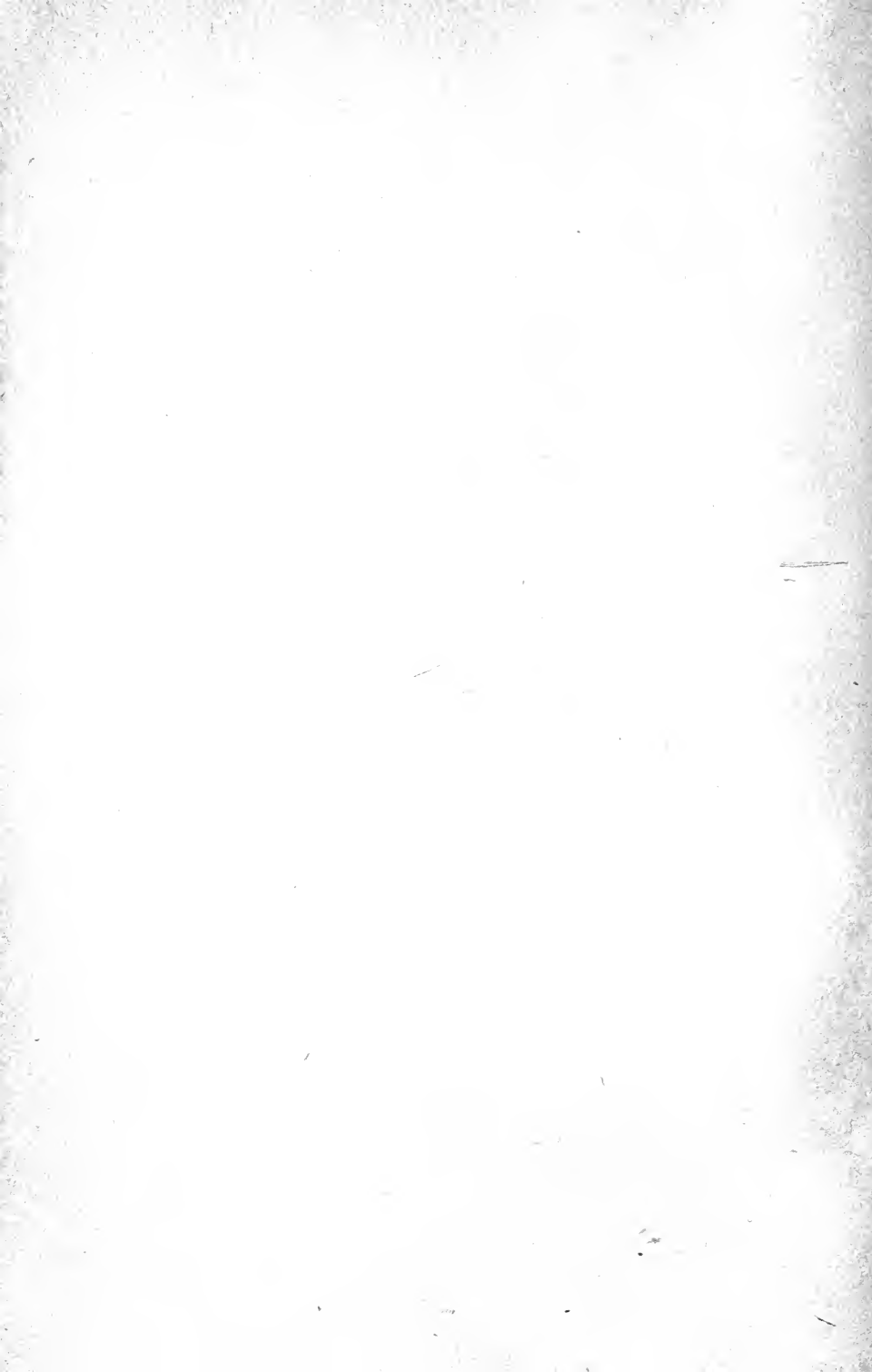
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# THE HELLENIC ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM

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## INTRODUCTION

For many years, and particularly since the appearance of Havet's *Le Christianisme et ses origines*,<sup>1</sup> and of Harnack's monumental *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*,<sup>2</sup> and the publication of Hatch's celebrated lectures on *The Influence of Greek Thought and Usages upon the Christian Church*,<sup>3</sup> scholars have realized that the origins of Christianity are to be sought in the Greek world even more than among the Jews, and that the Greek philosophers were the fathers of Christian theology, rather than the Hebrew prophets. In recent years, and particularly since the advent of the twentieth century, large numbers of special studies have appeared in which the dependence of the early Christians upon the Greeks of their day is clearly set forth: it is shown that in their special doctrines, such as those concerning salvation, redemption and immortality, as well as in their cosmological and moral theories, the Christians did not differ materially from many of their contemporaries. Up to the present, however, no study has been made of the origins of Christian asceticism from this point of view. Scholars have, of course, been aware that at the period of the rise of Christian asceticism, there was a considerable movement in the same direction in the Greek world, and have correctly inferred that it exercised a certain influence upon budding Christian asceticism. Moreover, scholars have attempted at times to account for certain fea-

<sup>1</sup> Paris, 1872-1884.

<sup>2</sup> Freiburg, 1886 (1 ed.).

<sup>3</sup> *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888.

tures of Christian asceticism by invoking Greek parallels: Zeller tried to explain the ascetic movement among the Christians of the first centuries as a survival of Cynicism;<sup>4</sup> many years later Weingarten attempted to derive Christian monasticism from an ascetic cult which he had found in the temple of Serapis at Memphis;<sup>5</sup> Reitzenstein, approaching the subject from the point of view of comparative literature, has more recently shown the influence which the contemporary aretologies had upon the early stories of Christian monks.<sup>6</sup> But these writers have only dwelt upon certain sides of the subject: if they attempted to generalize, as Weingarten did, and held that they had discovered the true and only source of Christian asceticism, their conclusions were wholly false.<sup>7</sup> The trouble was that there has been, up to the present, no rounded picture of the asceticism of the Greeks at the time, and consequently when scholars noticed resemblances between early Christian ascetics and the Cynics, or the recluses of the Serapeum, or some other special cult, they at once concluded that they had found the source of the Christian ascetic movement, for they completely ignored the other Greek forms of asceticism then prevalent. It is the purpose of the present study, then, to attempt to draw such a picture of Greek asceticism as will enable others to see to exactly how great an extent the Christians were dependent upon the Greeks for their ascetic ideas and ideals; it is the intention to give a rounded picture of Greek asceticism in the various forms in which it appeared at the time of the spread of Christianity. But no attempt will be made to show how these ideas were transferred into Christianity, or to write of early Christian asceticism: that would be too large a subject,

<sup>4</sup> *Eclecticism*, p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums in nachconstantinischen Zeitalter* (1877).

<sup>6</sup> *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (1906).

<sup>7</sup> For a scholarly criticism of these various theories, though from an orthodox Catholic point of view, see Leclercq, in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne*, art. "Cénobitisme."

for it would require a careful study, not only of Greek asceticism and early Church history, but also of Judaism and the many oriental religions which were prevalent in the Roman Empire; it is impossible to maintain that all Christian asceticism was of Greek origin. But it seems that by this collection of material for the strictly Greek asceticism in the Roman Empire, a contribution will be made to a future *History of the Origins of Christian Asceticism*.

Though, as has been stated, there is as yet no rounded picture of Greek asceticism, the subject is not a wholly new one. In recent years a number of scholars have been studying the subject, particularly in its early and more primitive phases; these scholars have quite succeeded in breaking down the old classic theory of Greek life which taught that there was no place for ascetic rites in Greece, at least in the pre-Hellenistic period. It used to be said that in Homeric days the land was filled with fighting nobles who found only the greatest pleasure in life and war, who had no time for pessimistic or melancholy thoughts, and whose religion was one of joy and gladness, giving no place to other-worldliness, and that in later times this same optimistic world-view continued; therefore the Greek people are to this day associated by many persons with all that shows harmony, serenity, reasonableness and joy in life. It may very well be the case that Greek thought and religion were characterized to an eminent degree by just these qualities—but they were not the only ones. After the recent studies of a large number of scholars, including Miss Harrison,<sup>8</sup> Farnell,<sup>9</sup> Wächter,<sup>10</sup> Fehrle,<sup>11</sup> and others, the old view, represented by Zöckler,<sup>12</sup> who dismissed Greece with a few pages in his general history of

<sup>8</sup> *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion* (1903).

<sup>9</sup> *The Evolution of Religion* (1905); *Cults of the Greek States* (1896–1909).

<sup>10</sup> *Reinheitsvorschriften in griechischen Kult* (1910).

<sup>11</sup> *Die kultische Keuschheit im Altertum* (1910).

<sup>12</sup> *Askese und Mönchtum* (1898).

asceticism, is now completely untenable. These scholars have made it perfectly clear that ascetic tendencies did exist in Greece from very early times, but they too give only partial pictures of Greek asceticism: they have concerned themselves only with the early and so-called primitive religions of Greece. Wächter and Fehrle, to be sure, whose studies are little more than compilations of Greek texts and inscriptions, have covered the later periods, too, but their works give none of the higher developments of Greek ascetical thought. But it is just these higher developments that are important for the student of early Christianity, for it was with them particularly that the early Christians came in contact. Up to the present, these higher developments have not been studied at all. In the present study, therefore, attention will be directed particularly to them. As they cannot be understood without some knowledge of the forms out of which they evolved and upon which they rested, it will be necessary to devote an introductory chapter to the asceticism of the early cults; but as these lower forms have already been well studied, this introductory chapter will be based largely upon these other studies. These primitive forms of asceticism constituted the substratum upon which later development was based, though they remained almost unaltered during the whole course of Greek history: in the closing period of the Greek world, Jamblichus shows that ideas were then prevalent which are also found in the early stages of Greek history; therefore a strictly chronological study is not essential, and the leading ideas may be illustrated from authors in the various periods of Greek history. At a very early date, however, development upon these elementary notions did begin; in the second chapter, therefore, attention will be devoted to these developments, particularly as found in Orphism, Pythagoreanism and some of the early philosophers. In the third chapter a careful study will be made of the asceticism of Plato; it will be seen that his thought upon the subject is

merely an exquisite exposition of the doctrines developed by his more obscure predecessors. These three chapters will constitute the first and introductory part of the study; they will set forth the essential elements contained in Greek ascetic thought. The second part of the study will be devoted to the different phases of the asceticism of the later Hellenistic age, which was contemporary with early Christianity. This second part is therefore the central part of the study, but it will readily be seen that a knowledge of the earlier period, and particularly of the thought of Plato, is absolutely indispensable to an understanding of the later part. Also the influence which Plato had directly upon many Christians, such as Origen, was very great.

# PART I

## EARLY GREEK ASCETICISM

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### CHAPTER I

#### ASCETICISM IN THE EARLY CULTS

In taking up a study of early Greek asceticism, it must be constantly borne in mind that the literary sources for this side of the Greek religion are not all that might be desired. Homer has nothing to say of asceticism, and very little to say of purifications in general.<sup>1</sup> This silence is probably due in part to the fact that Homer represents a different set of religious ideas than those contained in the Minoan religion; Homer was Aeolic, or Indo-European, but it seems that most of the rites of this purifying nature were of Ionic, Attic, Minoan origin.<sup>2</sup> At a later period, Aeschylus did take up this tradition and spoke considerably of purification, which, as will presently appear, is at the basis of all asceticism, but he never carried his ideas to ascetic extremes. The other classic authors have even less to say on the subject: a few

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Murray has supported a contrary view in his *Rise of the Greek Epic*, pp. 123-4, pointing to the fact that Homer's heroes let their hair grow long during the siege of Troy, and, referring to the unquestionable Jewish parallel custom, he assumes that this was "the visible sign of various abstinences," including one from women. But Andrew Lang, in his *World of Homer*, pp. 132ff., denies any such abstinences, showing that the Greeks let their hair grow long all the time, and did not abstain from women during the siege. "Homer knows nothing of taboos."

<sup>2</sup> Lang, p. 134: "These rites (of purification) are Ionic, Attic, and, in historic Greece, are Hellenic, also Asiatic. They make an inseparable barrier between Homeric and Ionic religion."

hints can be picked up from the other dramatists and the orators, but that is all. Nor is this surprising when we remember that this literature was written largely to entertain; if too much were said of sin and punishment, of pollution, purification and penance, it would be disagreeable and out of place here. It should be remembered, therefore, that the classic Greek literature gives only one side of the Greek religion—and this is not the side which interests the present study. Recent epigraphical discoveries have opened up a mine of new materials for the student of the Greek religion, but unfortunately most of the inscriptions which have been published are of late date: very few indeed which relate to this subject antedate the fifth century, while the majority come only from Hellenistic times. The study of ancient vase-paintings, too, has shed much light upon new phases of Greek religious life and thought. But after all, one of the main sources of information for the early Greek cults remains the writers of the Alexandrian period. Antiquarians of this epoch are the ones who have passed down most of what is known of the early Greek religion. The early Fathers of the Church, too, such as Clement of Alexandria, have preserved much valuable material. But the difficulties under which the Alexandrians worked are obvious. All that they could possibly know was the cults as they existed in their time; the persistency of such cults is well known, however, and it is extremely probable that they continued to exist for many centuries without undergoing any fundamental change. In the case of the Fathers of the Church, it must be remembered, too, that they were trying to show how foolish such beliefs and practises were, and consequently they were not very sympathetic observers; but on the other hand, it is also a fact that they were writing for pagans who were well acquainted with all these things, and must have known that if they misrepresented them too violently, they would merely discredit themselves with their readers.

But taking the materials as they are given, let us see what ascetic tendencies we can find in early Greece.

From the earliest times of which there is any record, the Greeks possessed certain ideas of purity which they expressed by the word *ἀγνεία*, and of stain, which they designated by *μίasma*, and of purifications which one so polluted had to undergo, and which were called *καθαρμοί*. Now, if anyone wished to enter a temple, or perform a sacrifice, or, in fine, enter into relations of any sort whatsoever with the gods, he had to be pure (*ἀγνός*). Thus Hesiod said, "being purified and pure, offer sacrifices to the immortal gods";<sup>3</sup> inversely, Homer made some one say, "I am afraid to pour out strong wine to Zeus, while having unwashed hands."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, everything connected with the act had to be pure. Thus Achilles purified the cup before pouring a libation to Zeus.<sup>5</sup> The things sacrificed had to be pure. Euripides made Iphigenia say to her brother, whom she had been ordered to sacrifice, "we shall say that it is not permitted to sacrifice you to the goddess, as you are not pure."<sup>6</sup> Plutarch remarked that "a thing to be sacrificed must be pure in both body and soul, and be unharmed and uncorrupted."<sup>7</sup> The whole thing is well summed up in an inscription coming from Astypalaia: "No one may enter the temple who is not pure."<sup>8</sup>

Injunctions of purity were particularly strict for priests. Exceptional purity was demanded of those who entered the temple every day and who handled the sacred things; they had to take unusual care not to pollute themselves.<sup>9</sup> In the first place, they had to keep away from forbidden things,

<sup>3</sup> *Op.* 336f.: *Κὰδ δ' ἔρδειν ἰέρ' ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν ἀγνῶς καὶ καθαρῶς.*

<sup>4</sup> *Il.* Z 266f.: *Χερσὶ δ' ἀνίπτοισιν Διὶ λείβειν αἶθροπα οἶνον ἄξομαι.* Cf. *Hes. Op.* 724.

<sup>5</sup> *Il.* II 228.

<sup>6</sup> *Eur. Iph. Taur.* 1035ff.: *Ὡς οὐ θέμις σε λέξομεν θύειν θεᾷ . . . οὐ καθαρὸν ὄντα.*

<sup>7</sup> *Plut. de def. orac.* 49.

<sup>8</sup> [*E*]s τὸ ἱερὸν μὴ ἐσέρπειν ὅστις μὴ ἀγνός ἐστι. Numerous other texts are given in Th. Wächter, *Reinheitsvorschriften in griechischen Kult*, esp. § 1.

<sup>9</sup> Wächter, pp. 12ff. and passim.



such as corpses, but that was not all: a life of complete purity was required. Thus Plato, in the *Laws*, said that one chosen priest should be scrutinized "first as to whether he is of sound body and legitimate birth; and in the second place, in order to show that he is of a perfectly good family, not stained with homicide or any other impurity in his own person, and also that his father and mother have led a similarly unstained life."<sup>10</sup> Pausanias said of the priests and priestesses of Artemis Hymnia in Orchomenos, "they are required not only to be pure from sexual intercourse and other things during their whole lives, but they do not have baths and other like things, nor do they enter the houses of individuals."<sup>11</sup> The ancient interpreters of the oracle at Dodona, the Selloi, were apparently forbidden to sleep in beds or wash their feet.<sup>12</sup> The Greeks were particularly insistent upon the sexual purity of priests. There were innumerable cults which demanded the absolute chastity of the priest or priestess; sometimes this obligation was extended to others who were not priests, but who had some function to perform in the cult notwithstanding. Apollo, having charge of purity himself, was supposed to be particularly careful about this matter. He was supposed to inspire Pythia by entering her through the sexual organs, wherefore absolute chastity was required of her.<sup>13</sup> Cassandra was another of his virgin priestesses;<sup>14</sup> others are mentioned in Thebes and Epirus.<sup>15</sup> Virgin priests and priestesses are also mentioned for Dionysos, Herakles, Zeus, Artemis, Athene, etc.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore obvious that priests had to be doubly careful to keep away

<sup>10</sup> Plat. *Leg.* VI 759c.

<sup>11</sup> Paus. VIII 13, 1.

<sup>12</sup> C. H. Moore, *Greek and Roman Ascetic Tendencies*, in Smyth, *Harvard Essays on Classical Subjects*, p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> Origen, *c. Cels.* VII 3.

<sup>14</sup> Eur. *Troad.* 41ff.

<sup>15</sup> Paus. IX 10, 4; Aelian, *Nat. An.*, 11, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Fehrle, pp. 75-126.

from polluting things: at times, this led to a veritably ascetic mode of life.

Certain of the Olympian gods were thought to have special care for purity. In Pallas Athene we find a goddess who concerned herself with all sorts of interests, and especially with intellectual ones, and who was a virgin and pure. Virgins were placed under her protection,<sup>17</sup> and she was even called "the Pure" and "the Purifier."<sup>18</sup> In the cult of Apollo particularly, attention was given to purity, as was just pointed out; this was because it is he who had charge of all things connected with purity,<sup>19</sup> as his very name shows. Liddell and Scott say that he was called Phoebus because of the purity and radiant beauty of youth; Miss Harrison remarks that the epithet has more to do with purity than radiant beauty. The root of the word meant "in a condition of ceremonial purity, holy in a ritual sense."<sup>20</sup> Plutarch says, "the ancients, it seems to me, called everything that was pure and sanctified *Phoebic*, as the Thessalians still say, I believe, of their priests when they are living in seclusion apart on certain prescribed days that they are living Phoebically."<sup>21</sup>

Now just what did this purity consist in? What was it that made one impure? Wächter gives an immense number of texts, taken from the Greek authors and inscriptions, which show the sorts of things which polluted a person. With the single exception of murder, none of the things forbidden are what we would call moral faults at all: they are

<sup>17</sup> Herod. iv, 180.

<sup>18</sup> Ἀγνὴ, Schol. ad Ar. *Nub.* 967; καθάριος, Aesch. *Eumen.* 578.

<sup>19</sup> But it is not true that Apollo was always a perfect model of purity himself; cf. Eur. *Ion*, 436ff., where he is roundly denounced for his "misdeeds" and told that if he does not reform he will not have money enough to pay his fines.

<sup>20</sup> Harrison, p. 394.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *de EI apud Delph.*, xx, 1: φοῖβον δὲ δὴ πού τὸ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀγνὸν οἱ παλαιοὶ πᾶν ὠνόμαζον ὥς ἔτι Θεσσαλοὶ τοὺς ἱερεῖας ἐν ταῖς ἀποφράσιν ἡμέραις αὐτοὺς ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν ἔξω διατρίβοντας οἶμαι φοιβονομεῖσθαι λέγουσι.—cf. Harrison, p. 394.

merely ritual faults; they are quite similar in character to the taboos of the most primitive peoples known to us to-day. The causes of pollution given in Wächter's work are (1) child-birth; a woman lying-in was impure, as were all who came in contact with her, the child, and even the house; in some cases this impurity lasted for forty days, and special rites were required for purification; (2) a woman during menstruation was impure; (3) certain diseases, especially insanity, demanded purifications; (4) a corpse was impure, as was anyone who approached one; a man had to purify himself after attending a funeral, while certain priests could not be present at one at all; (5) every murderer was impure, not only because of the approach to a corpse, but also, as Wächter maintains,<sup>22</sup> through the *μίασμα* of the soul of his victim, which followed him; (6) certain animals were impure, so that their flesh might not be sacrificed or eaten; in different cults, swine, goats, sheep, cattle, horses, asses, deer, dogs, birds, fish, etc., were taboo and in others all flesh food was forbidden; (7) in some cults, certain vegetables were forbidden, such as beans, lentils, garlic, onions, mallows, mint, apples, ivy, myrtle; also wine; (8) iron or bronze could not be brought near to certain sanctuaries, nor gold to others.<sup>23</sup> Of course, all these things were not forbidden to all Greeks; many of them were confined to a few small cults. Neither were they all contemporaneous. All that can be said is that some cult has been found in Greece at one period or another which regarded these things as taboo, or as they said, *άγρός*.

But even here, one of the most important sources of pollution is not mentioned: in fact, this source was so important that it could not be grouped with the others, but had to be treated in a separate volume. This is the pollution arising

<sup>22</sup> Wächter, p. 64; cf. Rohde, *Psyche*, I 264, n. 2; 275, n. 2; II 78, n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Large numbers of texts illustrating the nature of these taboos will be found in Wächter, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-118. See also, Solomon Reinach, *Mythes, Cultes et Religions*, I, pp. 24ff. *Encyc. Rel. Eth.*, art. "Birth," "Animals," etc.

from sexual intercourse, which is dealt with in Fehrle's companion volume on ritual chastity.<sup>24</sup> The regulations in regard to this were due to a vast variety of causes, including not only such important points as the theories in regard to the organization of the family, but also the wide-spread belief that the union of men, and particularly of women, with the divine was effected by this means (for examples, Pythia and several of the mysteries<sup>25</sup>) and that persons who had been so honored, or who aspired to being so honored, must abstain from such unions with mortals. But it is also undeniable that from the earliest times, the act was held to be polluting, even in wedlock.<sup>26</sup> Purifications were required in certain cases before a person so polluted could assist at any religious ceremony; even purifications could never completely wash away the stain, however, and for certain rites it was necessary to have little girls so young that there could be no question of their absolute purity.

If one inquires more carefully into the exact manner in which these things were supposed to be polluting, he finds that ideas in regard to evil spirits were invoked to explain it.<sup>27</sup> These evil spirits were in early times thought of as little winged sprites which fluttered about and were always anxious to attach themselves to people; if they ever succeeded, their unhappy host was sure to be not only polluted, but also afflicted with disease and other woes untold, until they were driven off again. Sickness was a sign that a person harbored such evil spirits, which probably explains the injunction, mentioned above, forbidding sick persons to enter a sanctuary. So he was doubly unfortunate, and sometimes the

<sup>24</sup> *Die kultische Keuschheit im Altertum.*

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Origen, *c. Cels.* VII 3; Diodorus, XVI 26; Fehrle, pp. 7ff.

<sup>26</sup> Τὰ ἀφροδίσια μάλει, Porph. *de Abst.* IV 20. Hesych., *s.v.* ἀγνεύειν, καθαρεύειν ἀπὸ τε ἀφροδισίων καὶ ἀπὸ νεκροῦ. Cf. Hes. *Op.* 733ff. Fehrle, ch. ii.

<sup>27</sup> See Wächter, pp. 2ff.; Fehrle, pp. 34ff.; 42ff.; Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion*, ch. iv; Bouché-Leclercq, in *Dict. des Antiq.*, art. "lustratio."

positive and material miseries thus occasioned loomed up larger than the alienation from God. At the very end of Greek history, Porphyry, while discussing these spirits, wrote, "because of them are purifications, not for inducing the presence of the gods, but in order that these things may keep away."<sup>28</sup> But it is certain that possession by these spirits also prevented men from approaching sacred things. However, the exact way in which the pollution was explained in the mythology is not so important for the present study as is the belief that it existed, and had to be washed away. What were the methods by which this was accomplished?

In some cases, it was very simple: mere washing was sufficient. Thus, a basin of water was placed at the entrance to the temple,<sup>29</sup> in which all who entered were supposed to wash themselves; if their stains were not very great, this is all that was demanded. In other cases, washing in sea-water was required. Thus Iphigenia tells the king that she must take the statue (which she is really planning to steal) and the two polluted prisoners to the sea to wash them and thus rid them of their pollution.<sup>30</sup> We shall presently see that one of the great ceremonies of the Eleusinian mysteries was the "Ἀλαδε μύσται, in which all the participants purified themselves in a lake of salt water. Sometimes the water of mineral springs was supposed to have purifying virtues superior to those of ordinary water.<sup>31</sup> On certain occasions the person or object to be purified, instead of being washed, was merely sprinkled with water; branches of laurel or olive trees were used for this purpose, just as the holy-water sprinklers are used in the Catholic Church to-day. In case

<sup>28</sup> Porph. *de philos. ex orac. haur.*, p. 149 (quoted by Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* IV 23, 3), καὶ διὰ τοῦτο αἱ ἀγνείαι, οὐ διὰ τοῦς θεοὺς προσηγουμένως, ἀλλ' ἐν οὗτοι ἀποστῶσι. The whole fragment is very important.

<sup>29</sup> Wächter, p. 7; *Dict. des Ant.*, art. "lustratio," where pictures of such basins are given; cf. art. "labrum."

<sup>30</sup> Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 1193: θάλασσα κλύζει πάντα τᾶνθρώπων κακά.

<sup>31</sup> Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie- und Religionsgeschichte*, p. 888.

a more thorough-going purification was deemed necessary, this could be accomplished by fire; it was done by fumigation, frequently with sulphur.<sup>32</sup> On other occasions purification was brought about by contact with very pure things; laurel branches were used for this purpose in the cults of Apollo, and olive in those of certain chthonian deities; sometimes the blood of a pig was used for this purpose.<sup>33</sup>

Such were the sorts of purifications which were demanded of individuals in case they became contaminated in any way. Just as the pollution had been individual, the purification was individual; the polluted person might require a little aid in the ceremonies, but that was all; the purification was strictly an individual matter. However, there were other occasions when the purification was collective: all of the citizens of the community took part and were purified together. In such cases the pollution was not traced to the fault of anybody, but seems to have been due rather to the general wear and tear of time; at certain times of the year it was felt that a general cleaning up and driving out of all evil spirits was desirable, so special rites were performed with this end in view. One such time was the early spring or late winter, just as the new life was beginning. Another was the time of the harvest (which comes in May and June in Greece). A third was the autumn. At each of these times there was a great public ceremony, and though purification was not always its only, or even its most prominent motive, elements of this nature were always to be found, and were in all probability the most primitive part. Thus in the Greek month of Anthesterion (= February), came the Anthesteria, which was paralleled among the Romans by the ceremonies in connection with the *februa*, or purifiers (whence our word Feb-

<sup>32</sup> The Greek word for sulphur is *θεῖον*, and is therefore identical with the word for divine, but this is accidental; it is supposed that the word is related to *θύω*, sacrifice. See Liddell and Scott, *s.vv.*; II. II 228; Od. x 481.

<sup>33</sup> Aeschyl. *Eumen.* 283, 458ff.

ruary). Later, when the harvest was at its height came ceremonies such as the Thargelia. Finally as the year was dying came the Thesmophoria. In all of these feasts there were elements of purification, though in classic times these were frequently overlaid with a mass of other rites. In her *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion*, Miss Harrison has been able to show that the primitive idea back of all of these was purification and the placation of demons. A consideration of these festivals is well worth our while, therefore, especially as their cleansing nature has been so fully established by Miss Harrison that we can base our study upon hers.<sup>34</sup>

The Anthesteria was a feast to Dionysos. It lasted for three days, the 11th to the 13th of the month, which three days were known as Pithoigia (cask-opening), Choes (cups) and Chytroi (pots). The three days were given over to drinking, revelling and rejoicing, so that at first sight everything seems to say that it was a simple wine festival in honor of Dionysos. Nevertheless a certain note of sadness ran through the whole ceremony, which should lead one to pause to ask if it was really such a simple merry-making. An old proverb preserved by Suidas strengthens this doubt, and gives the clue to the real interpretation of the feast. We are told that to those who were constantly demanding a repetition of the favors formerly received, one said, "Get out, Keres, it is no longer Anthesteria!" Keres is the Greek name for the little sprites of which we have already spoken as causing illness, etc. Suidas, who preserved the proverb, says that "in the Anthesteria, ghosts are going about the city."<sup>35</sup> This shows us that originally the Anthesteria was an All Souls' Day. The scholiast on Aristophanes quotes Theopompos,

<sup>34</sup> *Prolegomena, etc.*, ch. 2-4, pp. 32-162; cf. *Dict. des Ant.* and Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, under the various feasts; A. Mommsen, *Feste der Stadt Athen*.

<sup>35</sup> Suid. s.v. *θύραζε*· *θύραζε κῆρες, οὐκ ἐν Ἀνθεστήρια, ὥς κατὰ τὴν πόλιν τοῖς Ἀνθεστηριοῖς τῶν ψυχῶν περιερχομένων*.

who said that at this feast they sacrificed to Hermes Chthonios.<sup>36</sup> The lexicographer Photius, explaining the words *μαρὰ ἡμέρα*, "day of pollution," says that such a day occurred "in the day of Choes in the month of Anthesterion, in which they believed that the spirits of the dead rose up again. From early morning they used to chew buckthorn and anointed their doors with pitch."<sup>37</sup> Buckthorn was a purgative, and would therefore drive out of the body whatever evil spirits might be there;<sup>38</sup> as pitch was especially pure, it would prevent their coming into the house. The Anthesteria, then, was primarily a festival of purification from spirits, and more especially, the spirits of the dead. The whole performance was but one example of a general form of rite to which the Greeks gave the name *ἐναγισμός*, which was intended to remove the stain of blood from a man and thus purify him: the methods used were washings of one sort or another, and sacrifices; each had the positive effect of purification.<sup>39</sup> At the bottom of this great festival of Athens, therefore, was the idea of pollution and purification; as we examine others, we shall find it in them, too.

After some months came another important festival, which was known as the Thargelia, and which was an offering of the first-fruits of the harvest. This, too, seems to have been a time at which purity was deemed essential, and we consequently find that a considerable part of the ceremony was devoted to its acquisition. Thus, Diogenes Laërtius says in his life of Socrates that "he was born on the 6th day of Thargelion, the day when the Athenians purify the city."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Schol. ad Ar. *Ran.* 218.

<sup>37</sup> Photius s.v. *μαρὰ ἡμέρα*· ἐν τοῖς Χοῦσιν Ἀνθεστηριῶνος μηνός, ἐν ᾧ δοκοῦσιν αἱ ψυχαὶ τῶν τελευτησάντων ἀνιέναι, ῥάμνῳ ξωθεν ἐμασῶντο καὶ πίπτει τὰς θύρας ἔχριον.

<sup>38</sup> Porphyry speaks of evil spirits which "creep into those making use" of impure things (*εἰσδύνοντες τοῖς χρωμένοις*), *de phil. ex orac. haur.* 149.

<sup>39</sup> For these *ἐναγισμοί* in general, see Harrison, pp. 55–76.

<sup>40</sup> Diog. Laert. ii 4.



They did this through persons known as *φαρμακοί*: Harpocration remarks, "at Athens they led out two men to be purifications for the city; it was at the Thargelia; one was for the men and the other for the women."<sup>41</sup> The way they did this was to take some person, and by ritually heaping all the impurities of the city upon him, to make a scape-goat of him: he was pelted and driven out of the city, and the impurities went with him. The scholiast on Aristophanes says that "the pharmakoi purified the cities by their slaughter," and then goes on to say, "for the Athenians maintained certain very ignoble and useless persons, and on the occasion of any great calamity befalling the city, I mean a pestilence or anything of the sort, they sacrificed these persons with a view to purification from pollution and they called them purifications (*καθάρματα*)."<sup>42</sup> For the details of this ceremony, we are indebted to a very late author, Tzetzes (A.D. 1150), who incorporated fragments of Hipponax, of the sixth century B.C. He says, "they gave him cheese with their hands and a barley cake and figs, and seven times they smote him with leeks and wild figs and other wild plants. Finally they burnt him with fire with the wood of wild trees and scattered the ashes into the sea or to the winds, for a purification, as I said, of the suffering city."<sup>43</sup> Whether or not this human sacrifice was maintained in classic times, it is hard to say; Miss Harrison thinks that it was,<sup>44</sup> but this view is by no means universally accepted; it may very well be that he was merely pelted and driven out of the city and forbidden to return. At any rate, the rite is clearly one of purification, behind which is the same idea that is found in the Christian conception of the atonement: that the punishment of one may purify many from their stains. However, there was no idea of an angry god to be appeased, nor of a

<sup>41</sup> Harpocrat. *s.v.* *φαρμακός*.

<sup>42</sup> Schol. ad Ar. *Eq.* 1136.

<sup>43</sup> Tzetzes, *Hist.* 23, 726ff.

<sup>44</sup> Harrison, pp. 102ff.

vicarious sacrifice. The whole thing consisted in loading all the pollutions upon the unfortunate scape-goat, and then driving him out of the city; naturally the polluting spirits went with him, and the city thus became purified.

A third ceremony, the last which we shall study here, came in the fall, and was known as the Thesmophoria. It was performed by women only. Like the Anthesteria, it lasted three days, from the 11th to the 13th of Pyanepsion (= October–November); these three days were known as the Kathodos and Anodos (down-going and uprising), Nesteia (fasting), and Kalligeneia (fair-born or fair-birth); on the first day women who had already been purifying themselves for nine days<sup>45</sup> went down into certain clefts or chasms, called μέγαρα, taking with them suckling pigs, which they sacrificed, and bringing up the remains of last year's pigs; during the second day, these remains were exposed upon the altar, while the women sat about, fasting; on the third day, the rotten pig's flesh was mixed with seed and strewn upon the fields. The object of the rite is obviously to promote fertility: to this end there were certain other rites, in connection with representations of the male generative organ; it has also been suggested that the squatting of the women on the ground was to permit union with a chthonian deity, which had been prepared for by their nine days of continence before and during the feast.<sup>46</sup> We are told that they put branches of a purifying and anaphroditic virtue on their beds.<sup>47</sup> Of especial interest is the fasting, for this is the first time we have come upon this popular form of asceticism. The Stoic Cornutus writes, "they fast in honor of Demeter . . . when they celebrate her feast at the season of sowing."<sup>48</sup> Athenaeus mentions the fast;<sup>49</sup> one of the Cynics says, "my friends are

<sup>45</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10, 431.

<sup>46</sup> Cahen in *Dict. des Ant.*, art. "Thesmophoria."

<sup>47</sup> Plin. *His. Nat.* 24, 59.

<sup>48</sup> Cornut. *de Theol.* 28

<sup>49</sup> Ath. 307ff.

keeping a fast as if this were the middle day of the Thesmophoria"; the fast had thus become proverbial.<sup>50</sup> A votive relief has been found showing a procession of women bringing gifts to the Earth-mother, who is crouching upon the ground as the fasting women did on this day.<sup>51</sup> The reasons for this fasting were undoubtedly, first, the presence of the rotten pig's flesh; when so sacred a thing was present it would be most unbecoming to eat profane things; and secondly, if a worshipper did eat, she would greatly risk getting some evil demon on her which would incapacitate her for taking any further part in the ceremonies; nine days had been required to attain the required purity, and now extra precautions had to be observed to retain it. It is remarked in the passage already quoted from Porphyry<sup>52</sup> that these evil spirits come at us when we eat and thus settle upon our bodies;<sup>53</sup> so if one wishes to remain perfectly pure, he had better abstain from eating. The two rites are obviously for the attainment and preservation of that ritual purity which is required of all those who approach sacred things.

Thus, it appears that in three of the most important religious ceremonies of Athens, great attention was given to ritual purity. It had to be acquired by means of positive acts, which demanded not only the time and attention of the person to be purified, but also entailed a certain expense (in case of a sacrifice) and positive renunciations; if the purity thus acquired had to be maintained for any length of time, this could be done only through further privations and ceremonies. From the earliest times, therefore, there were persons in Greece who believed that purity could be purchased only at the price of real asceticism.

But as yet, only isolated rites have been described. The

<sup>50</sup> Harrison, 126ff.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127, fig. 12; cf. *Ath. Mitt.* 1899, taf. viii, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Supra*, p. 13, n. 28.

<sup>53</sup> Porph. *de philos. ex orac. haur.* p. 149: καὶ γὰρ μάλιστα ταῖς ποιαῖς τροφαῖς χαίρουσι, σιτουμένων γὰρ ἡμῶν προσίασι καὶ προσιζάνουσι τῷ σώματι.

same tendencies will be found, however, if one of the cults is examined in its entirety. Let us take the mysteries of Eleusis.<sup>54</sup> These formed one of the oldest cults in Greece, and survived as long as paganism itself survived. As they reach back into hoary antiquity, modern scholars have been led to suggest that they were perhaps a relic of the old agricultural life of the Minoan period.<sup>55</sup> The mysteries were subsequently taken under the protection of the city of Athens, which of course added enormously to their dignity. Their priesthood became more important, and their rites were so celebrated that they were sought by people from all over the world.<sup>56</sup> In Hellenistic times they were taken as one of the signs of the unity of the Greek-speaking world. Though continuing to exist down to the very end of Greek civilization, they underwent but little development after the seventh century B.C.; in character the rites always remained rather primitive.

According to Isocrates, the mysteries reminded the Athenians of the two benefits which they had received from Demeter, the goddess to whom they were dedicated: first, agriculture, and secondly, the initiation which gave a hope of a blessed immortality.<sup>57</sup> The rites had originally (if we are to trust modern scholars) the purpose of increasing the fertility of the land and of assuring good crops; participation in them assured the participant of a happy life beyond the

<sup>54</sup> The best book on the mysteries is Foucart, *Les Mystères d'Eleusis* (1914). Cf. Harrison, pp. 540-572; *Dict. des Antiq.* (art. "Mystères," "Eleusinia").

<sup>55</sup> Foucart, ch. iii, and pp. 248ff.

<sup>56</sup> Foucart, pp. 263ff.; *Dict. des Antiq.*

<sup>57</sup> Isocr. *Panegy.* 28: [Δήμητρος] δόσης δωρεὰς διττὰς αἵπερ μέγιστα τυγχάνουσιν οὔσαι, τοῖς τε καρποῖς, οἱ τοῦ μὴ θηριωδῶς ζῆν ἡμᾶς αἴτιοι γεγόνασι, καὶ τῇ τελετῇ, ἧς οἱ μετασχόντες περὶ τε τῆς τοῦ βίου τελευτῆς καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος αἰῶνος ἡδύους τὰς ἐλπίδας ἔχουσιν. Cf. *Hymn.* in Cer. 480-2: ὀλβιος, ὃς τὰ δ' ὅπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων· ὃς δ' ἀτελὴς ἱερῶν, ὃς τ' ἄμμορος, οὐποδ' ὁμοίων αἴσαν ἔχει φθιμένος περ ὑπὸ ζόφῳ ἡρόεντι. Cf. Aristoph. *Ran.* 154-8, 448-459; Soph. apud Plut. *de Aud. Poet.* 4; Cic. *Leg.* II 14, 36; *Dict. des Antiq.*, art. "Eleusinia" VIII, "Les mystères et l'autre vie."

grave. The ceremonies consisted in a dramatic representation of the myth of Demeter.

There are two points in which these mysteries are of interest to us, first, the purity required of all who sought initiation, and secondly, the higher purity demanded of the priests during the period of the great mysteries.

Only those were admitted to the initiation who had undergone a certain preparation. In the first place, those wishing to be initiated had to go through the "lesser mysteries" before they could be admitted to the greater; in the course of these preparations, the candidates were purified and washed in the Ilissos River.<sup>58</sup> As this was done at the end of the month of Anthesterion, it was over six months before the definite initiation took place. When the second part, or the Grand Mysteries, arrived, the preparation was continued. First the candidates were instructed in the myth of Demeter, without a knowledge of which the rites would be unintelligible; as this was kept a profound secret by the mystics, only those who had been initiated knew it. A certain interpretation of the myth was also taught. But the main point was the ritual preparation, which was much more complicated and rigorous than anything we have yet seen. At the very beginning the herald forbade "whoever does not have clean hands."<sup>59</sup> Before this the candidates had been observing a fast—which purified their hands; for several days they had taken no form of food, so long as the sun was in the heavens. There was a myth that while seeking her daughter, Demeter had refused all food and drink for nine days, and it was supposed to be in memory of this that the mystics fasted; however the myth is clearly aetiological, that is, it was invented

<sup>58</sup> Polyæn. *Strat.* V 17: τὸν Ἰλισσόν, οὗ τὸν καθαρμὸν τελοῦσι τοῖς ἐλάττοσι μυστηρίοις. Schol. ad Ar. *Plut.* 845: ἔστι τὰ μικρὰ [μυστήρια] ὥσπερ προκαθαρσις καὶ προάγνευσις τῶν μεγάλων.

<sup>59</sup> The exact formula is preserved by Theon of Smyrna, p. 22: τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦτο κηρύττεται ὅστις τὰς χεῖρας μὴ καθαρὸς.

afterwards to explain the rite, and not *vice versa*.<sup>60</sup> They were especially strict about certain foods; the mystagogues, or teachers, were constantly saying, "If you eat this or that, you are not pure,"<sup>61</sup> Among the things specially forbidden were a kind of shark (*γαλεός*), mullet (*έρυθρίνος*), crayfish (*κάραβος*), a certain sea-fish, "black tail" (*μελάνουρος*), red mullet (*τρίγλη*); at least some of these were foods especially sought after by the Greeks of the fourth century.<sup>62</sup> But for a variety of reasons, they were held to be impure, so could not be eaten by those who wished to be pure.<sup>63</sup>

It was on the 15th of Boedromion that they assembled at Eleusis, and the herald made the proclamation mentioned above. On the following day took place the most important rites of purification, which went under the name of "*ἄλαδε μύσται*," "to the sea, mystics," the shout which accompanied the principal ceremony. The mystics, who had returned from Eleusis the day before and were then at Athens, went and purified themselves by washing in the sea, and by sacrificing a pig previously purified by immersion in the sea. The blood of these animals was considered a most powerful agent of purification, for it was thought to attract all the evil spirits irresistibly and to hold them.<sup>64</sup> Each person had to have a pig of his own; thus the purification was individual, but being performed simultaneously by the whole group, was the

<sup>60</sup> However, Foucart (p. 284) here as always insists that the mythological interpretation is the true one. Of course he is correct in saying that they explained their fasting by the myth; but the real reason why they fasted was because it was customary, and because they thought that the act gave positive virtues, etc.; they later invented or adapted the myth to explain their acts.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Liban. *Corinth.* p. 356: *καὶ ἰδίᾳ πάλιν τὸ εἶ του καὶ του ἥ εἰ τοῦδε ἐγείσω, οὐ καθαρὸς πάρεῖ, καὶ πολλὴ τοῦτου παρὰ τοῖς μυσταγωγοῖς ἐπιμέλεια.*

<sup>62</sup> Foucart, p. 287.

<sup>63</sup> Thus the shark was thought to be impure because it laid its eggs by the mouth, the black-tail because it ate disagreeable food which other fish did not eat; on the other hand, they abstained from red mullet because of its fecundity, which they honored, etc., cf. Foucart, p. 285.

<sup>64</sup> Foucart, p. 294.

more powerful. The bodies of these pigs were then burnt and the ashes scattered. During the fifth century, a feast in honor of Asklepios was introduced into the ceremony which retarded the return to Eleusis by two days. As the purity of the participants had to be maintained all this time, unusual precautions were necessary. The mystics could not appear in public, but shut themselves up in their houses, giving themselves over undoubtedly to fasting and abstinences; it was a veritable retreat.<sup>65</sup>

It has been inferred by some, from the aetiology of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, that there were other rites of purification, at least for children, which consisted in passing through fire; but there is little positive evidence for this.<sup>66</sup>

A further point which has been urged is the meaning of the word *mystery* itself. The ancients related the word to *μύω*, "I shut my eyes and ears and lips," so mysteries were things secret and not talked about. However, Miss Harrison suggests a better derivation. She connects it with the word *μύσος*, a pollution, and makes the "mystery" a ceremony of purification from pollution. Lydus makes the same suggestion: "mysteries," he says, "are from the taking away of a pollution (*μύσος*) as equivalent to purification."<sup>67</sup> At any rate, it is clear that purification was an essential element of the mysteries.

In addition to this purity of those to be initiated, there was a higher grade which had to be attained by the priests. Arguing from a passage in Pausanias, some have maintained

<sup>65</sup> Foucart, p. 295; Aristot. *Constit. Ath.* 56.

<sup>66</sup> Harrison, pp. 156ff.; F. B. Jevons, *Introduct. to the Hist. of Rel.*, ch. xxiv app.

<sup>67</sup> Harrison, p. 154. Lyd. *de mens.* IV 38: *μυστήρια ἀπὸ τῆς στερήσεως τοῦ μύσου ἀντὶ τῆς ἁγιοσύνης*. Cf. Clem. Al. *Protr.* ii: *μυστήρια . . . ἀπὸ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον μύσους*. " 'Mysteries' (ought to be derived) from the pollution relating to Dionysos." Cf. Eur. *Suppl.* 470: *λύσαντα σεμνὰ στεμμάτων* and *El.* 87: *ἐκ θεοῦ μυστηρίων*.

that an absolute celibacy was required of them.<sup>68</sup> We have already seen that similar demands were made upon the priests and priestesses in various other cults, but it is not certain that it was an absolute demand in this case. Quite the contrary, we have an inscription from Eleusis which is the dedication of a votive offering raised to a hierophant by his wife.<sup>69</sup> This came from the first century B.C., so if Pausanias is right, the celibacy requirement is a later addition. What is more probable is that continence was imposed upon the priests for the period of the mysteries only. At any rate, it is clear that at least this much was required, so we may say that a special purity was demanded of the priests.<sup>70</sup> These special restrictions for the clergy are better shown, however, in the class of priestesses known as the *ἱέρειαι παναγείς*. The few literary sources which we have show us that they were celibate and lived in common.<sup>71</sup> A story of the legendary epoch depicts them united in a banquet after the sacrifice.<sup>72</sup> When the sacred objects were taken from Eleusis to Athens, it was they who carried them during the crossing of the Rheitan lakes, according to a decree of 421.<sup>73</sup> On other circumstances, they were associated with the hierophant and under his direction, as during the procession of the Kalamaia.<sup>74</sup> At Eleusis they dwelt in houses belonging to the Two Goddesses (Demeter and Kore) and

<sup>68</sup> Speaking first of other mysteries, he says (II 14): *ιεροφάντης δὲ οὐκ ἐς τὸν βίον πάντα ἀποδεδείκται, κατὰ δὲ ἐκάστην τελετὴν ἄλλοτὲ ἐστὶν ἄλλος σφίσιν αἰρετός, λαμβάνων, ἣν ἐθέλη, καὶ γυναῖκα. καὶ ταῦτα διάφορα τῶν ἐν Ἑλευσίνι νομίζουσι, τὰ δὲ ἐς αὐτὴν τὴν τελευτὴν ἐκείνων ἐστὶν ἐς μίμῃσιν.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ἱεροφάν[την] Μενε[κλ]εῖδην Θεοφύ[μου Κυδ]αθηναίᾳ ἡ γυνή.*—*Bull. de corr. hellen.*, 1895, p. 128; Foucart, p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Arrian. *Dissert. Epict.* III 21: *οὐκ ἐσθλήτη ἔχεις, ἣν δεῖ τὸν ιεροφάντην, . . . οὐχ ἡγνευκας ὡς ἐκείνος.* ("Agros here is castus").

<sup>71</sup> Hesych.: *Παναγείς* · Ἀθήνησι ἱέρειαι · ἱέρεια ἥτις οὐ μίσγεται ἀνδρὶ. *Bekker, Anecd.*, p. 212: *ἄγρος καὶ τὸ τίμιον καὶ ἀξιον σεβάσματος ἐξ οὗ αἱ ἱέρειαι ἀναγείς καὶ ἀγῆ τὰ μυστήρια καὶ ἄλλα τινά.* p. 330: *ἐξ οὗ καὶ ἱέρειαι παναγείς.*

<sup>72</sup> Demo, frg. 1, in Didot, *F.H.G.* I 378.

<sup>73</sup> *Ath. Mitt.*, 1894, p. 163.

<sup>74</sup> C. I. A. IV, p. 122.



were supported at their expense.<sup>75</sup> They were not ordinary priestesses, but rather resembled a religious community devoted to the Two Goddesses. Some have recognized in them the Bees (*Μέλισσαι*) of which Porphyry and several grammarians speak.<sup>76</sup> At any rate they represent the nearest approach to a genuinely ascetic life which is to be found in early Greece.

The various facts which we have set forth are amply sufficient to prove that ideas of pollution and purity are to be found in the Greek religion at all the stages of its development. It is perfectly certain that the Greeks had the idea that there were some things which were incompatible with the gods, and which therefore could not be brought into contact with anything which pertained to the gods. And not only were they incompatible with the gods themselves, but as this characteristic of theirs was to a high degree contagious, nothing which had been in close contact with them could approach sacred things either, without a preliminary purification. Now when this idea is once firmly established we have the foundation of all asceticism: the sole end and aim of the ascetic is to keep himself as free as possible from all these pollutions, and to be constantly purifying himself from those which he has incurred in spite of all his precautions. To this end, he removes himself as far as possible from the sources of pollution, he "flees the world," and gives himself over to prayers, fasts, vigils and other purificatory exercises, in order that he may remain pure, and approach as nearly as possible to the divine. But this definition would tend to make all men ascetics; the injunctions which we have been observing were applicable to all alike: if their mere observance makes men ascetics, the whole population of ancient Greece would consequently have been such. Now as will be seen in the course of this study, there actually is a certain

<sup>75</sup> C. I. A. IV, p. 203, l. 81: *Εἰς τὰς ἱερὰς οἰκίας ταῖς ἱεραῖς θυράσματα.*

<sup>76</sup> Foucart, pp. 214f.

asceticism immanent in the whole religious life, but it would undeniably be an abuse of language to carry the point to this extreme. The practical distinction is this: all men are polluted from time to time and must be purified—all men sin and must do penance, to put it in Christian terms—but the great majority are not especially scrupulous about the matter, and if the great stains are washed away, and a fair average of purity is maintained, they are content to let it go at that; but some persons are more careful, and are not content with this average purity; they want to raise themselves to a still higher degree of purity, and therefore submit themselves to all sorts of extraordinary penances and abstinences; these are the veritable ascetics. We have found examples of these, too, and we have observed some primitive cults in which it was required that there be certain persons who maintained a state of purity above that of ordinary people. We are justified in saying, therefore, that these persons were ascetics.

In the first place were the priests, for whom there were extraordinary regulations in regard to purity, and especially in regard to chastity: we might say that the priests who lived up to these regulations were ascetics, for by acts of renunciation and abnegation, they sought to attain a purity higher than that with which the ordinary person was content. The Eleusinian mysteries, too, tended in this direction, for not everybody was initiated; those who were did it because they wished to be unusually pure, and because special rewards, in the form of immortality, were promised to those who attained to this degree of purity; we have also seen the ascetic elements in the rites conferring this purity. Finally there can be no doubt of the genuinely ascetic nature of the restrictions placed upon the Eleusinian priesthood, and particularly upon the priestesses known as the *ἱέρειαι παναγείς*: here we have the essential features of a veritable monastic life.

Other cases of early Greek asceticism are sometimes men-

tioned. Thus Herodotus and Pindar mention a certain Abaris, a Hyperborean, who is said to have gone all around the world on an arrow, fasting;<sup>77</sup> later writers associate him with Pythagoras,<sup>78</sup> so there may have been other ascetic features to this performance; his fasting may have helped give him the supernatural power required for such a feat. Another celebrated ascetic of early times was Epimenides, who purified Athens in the latter part of the seventh century;<sup>79</sup> his fasts and his general ascetic form of life are told by Diogenes Laërtius and others.<sup>80</sup> But none of these men added anything new: they are merely further examples of what we have already seen, and only serve to make more certain our contention that ascetic tendencies existed in Greece from the very earliest times.

As to the origin of these ascetic tendencies we can say almost nothing. In his recent work on the mysteries of Eleusis, Foucart has argued that the rites were introduced into Greece from Egypt.<sup>81</sup> One of his proofs of this is their asceticism, which he compares with that of the devotees of Isis and Osiris; he even claims that fasting was a rite unknown to other early cults in Greece (he includes the Thesmophoria with the Eleusinian rites, as being in honor of Demeter).<sup>82</sup> So it may be that this cult, with its fasts and its asceticism, was introduced from Egypt; but in any case, the introduction took place very early (at least fifteen hun-

<sup>77</sup> Herod. iv 36; Pind. frg. 270. Cf. Plato, *Charm.* 158b, where he is mentioned as a wonder-working physician. References in later literature are numerous.

<sup>78</sup> Jamb. *de Vit. Pythag.* xix § 91.

<sup>79</sup> Or perhaps the end of the sixth; cf. Pauly-Wisowa, s.v.

<sup>80</sup> Diels, *Frag. der Vorsokrater*, II, pt. i, pp. 489ff., esp. 490, ll. 16ff., 492, 25ff., 493, 4ff.; Rohde, *Psyche*, II 96ff.; W. Capelle, *Altgriechische Askese*, in *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum*, 25 (1910), p. 683.

<sup>81</sup> Foucart, Pt. I; cf. Harrison, pp. 120ff.; this was the belief of the ancients themselves, Herod. ii 171.

<sup>82</sup> Foucart, pp. 62ff.

dred years before Christ according to Foucart), so we may say that it was a part of the religion of Greece at the earliest period with which we are acquainted. It, and the other forms of asceticism which we have signalized, were a part of the Greek religion from the very start.

But really there is no occasion to point out a specific origin for all these forms of asceticism, since they all are to be found in practically every known religion. Wächter and Fehrle give numerous citations from secondary works establishing parallel rites and beliefs in other religions. The asceticism which we have been describing shows remarkable similarities with that found in the most primitive peoples of whom we have any knowledge.<sup>83</sup>

Nor does it make the slightest difference to the present study what their origin was. As has already been clearly stated, this chapter is merely introductory; it is intended to summarize the work of previous scholars who have made special studies of early Greek religion. Their conclusions in regard to the origin and interpretation of these rites have been mentioned in passing, but it cannot be emphasized too strongly that the remainder of our study does not depend in any way upon the truth or falsity of these conclusions. All that this chapter has sought to establish is that at an early period, the Greeks had very decided notions of purity and pollution, and that from these, they deduced a theology which at times demanded genuinely ascetic acts. If this has been established, as we believe that it has, the foundation is laid for the higher developments of ascetic thought among the Greeks, which is the subject of the present study.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Bk. III, ch. 1, pp. 299ff. (Eng. tr.).

## CHAPTER II

### ASCETICISM IN THE ORPHIC MOVEMENT

The facts which we have been discussing so far all originate in the most primitive and ancient form of the Greek religion which we can know. But though primitive, they did not pass away with primitive Greece; on the contrary, they remained as a substratum of the Greek religion throughout the course of its history. As Greek society advanced, however, the religion naturally developed also. And about the eighth century, such an advance did begin to be noticeable. At this time began the period of commercial expansion and colonization. The Ionian cities and particularly Miletus took the lead, but others in Greece proper came close behind. Thus, the relative isolation of former times was broken down to a certain extent, and the intelligence of ordinary men was raised; an extensive reorganization of society then became necessary, above all in the intellectual world.<sup>1</sup> This social movement also had its effects upon the Greek religion. According to Gruppe, an oriental mysticism entered Greece at this time.<sup>2</sup> New cults arose, and old ones were transformed. At this time, too, the religion became more diversified; with the larger number of cults, different sorts were offered, and a person could choose, to a certain extent at least, the one to which he would give his closest allegiance. Thus, some people developed the religion of the Olympian gods, but there were others who were not satisfied with this. The old longing for purity remained in their hearts, but their old rites

<sup>1</sup> For this general movement and its repercussions upon philosophy and religion, see Eduard Meyer, *Gesch. des Altertums*, II, Bk. 3, pp. 533-762; Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte*, I, ch. 2, pp. 127-509.

<sup>2</sup> Gruppe, *Gesch. der griech. Mythologie*, I § 72.

could no longer satisfy it—nor could Olympus, in spite of its glorious splendors. So a new religious movement came over Greece in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., which was a continuation and revival of the old native religion, and also a development upon it. "The essence of the new religion was the belief that man could become god: the new ritual feature it introduced, a feature wholly lacking in the old uneaten 'sacrifice,' was mystical communion by eating the body of the god. But as man was mortal, there was mortality to be purged away; and hence, although with a new faith and a new hope, men reverted to the old ritual of purification."<sup>3</sup>

The first representative of this new religious movement to appear in Greece was the religion of Dionysos. Though there may have been an old Greek god of somewhat the same nature, the real Dionysos cult seems to have been introduced into Greece from Thrace, between the ninth and sixth centuries. In Thrace, the cult was adapted to the wild and savage nature of the country and its people, and had a highly orgiastic character. It was celebrated upon the mountains at night, in the midst of burning torches, tumultuous music and loud cries; the rites were performed mostly by women, who danced and revelled thus until they, like the Mainads whom they impersonated, became quite beside themselves. Being wholly unable to account for this extraordinary madness which thus seized them, they attributed it to the god; he was thought of as "insane."<sup>4</sup>

When the cult was introduced into Greece, it was long a scandal; the more sober Greeks did not at all approve of their women carrying on in such a way on the mountains at night.

<sup>3</sup> Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p. 162, cf. p. 478.

<sup>4</sup> For the Thracian rites of Dionysos, see Rohde, *Psyche*, II, ch. i-ii. Foucart, *Le Culte de Dionysos en Attique*, in *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (1904), ch. 2; and the articles on "Dionysos" in Pauly-Wissowa, Roscher and the *Dictionnaire des Antiquités*. The references to Dionysos in classic writers are collected in Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, V, pp. 280-334.

But gradually the rites became softened and toned down; Dionysos became civilized. He became associated with wine (undoubtedly because of the similar effects of these two forms of inspiration) and presently found himself one of the most popular gods of Greece. The details of his cult do not interest the present study, for it hardly seems probable that this ecstatic religion of a wine god should be of importance for the development of ascetic ideals. This was not entirely the case, however. For its rites led its worshippers to believe in an external god, with whom it was possible for an individual to unite himself: the Bacchantes felt the god within them, they believed themselves inspired. This led to the development of several beliefs in regard to the possibility of union with god, sacraments, and the immortality of the soul, all of which were put to use by later ascetical theologians.<sup>5</sup> But the chief importance of the Dionysos cult for the present study lies in its later developments, particularly Orphism. Here there was real asceticism.

The origins of Orphism are by no means clear, but one thing at least seems certain, namely, that it was born of the religion of Dionysos, and in fact, was a higher spiritual development of it. Legend had it that, like the religion of Dionysos, Orphism originated in Thrace. Ancient and modern writers, however, have suggested various other sources: some have noticed resemblances with Egyptian practices; others with the mysteries of Samothrace; some have claimed Phrygian or Cretan origins; a connection with Pythagoras has been claimed by others; while if we are to take the word of the early Christians for it, Orpheus derived practically all his doctrine from the books of Moses.<sup>6</sup> There is probably a certain element of truth in all of these conjectures except the

<sup>5</sup> For the influence of Dionysos, see also Capelle, in *Neue Jahrb. f. kl. Altertum*, 25 (1910), pp. 684ff.

<sup>6</sup> References to authors who have supported these views will be found in Monceaux, in *Dict. des Antiq.*, art. "Orphici."

last; in the course of their evolution, the Orphics probably did adopt elements from all of these various sources. But during the early stages of the history of the sect, these were all so well assimilated and adapted to the needs and desires of the Greek people that the religion was in no way a foreign one, but was so thoroughly Hellenic in its nature that some have been led to deny a foreign origin at all. This is, however, an untenable position; modern scholars are pretty generally agreed upon the Thracian origin of Orphism.<sup>7</sup>

Tradition had it, too, that the religion was founded by Orpheus. The legends concerning this singer were numerous and varied, but they do not concern us here, any more than the much-disputed question of the historical existence of Orpheus does: it makes little difference to us whether he really existed, as Miss Harrison has recently maintained, or whether he did not, as others, since the days of Aristotle, have held.<sup>8</sup> The first literary references to Orphism are in Ibycos (c. 560) and Pindar (c. 490);<sup>9</sup> during the latter half of the sixth century the earliest Orphic books known were composed or collected.<sup>10</sup> So we can state that during the sixth and following centuries the Orphic cult spread throughout Greece, and then proceed to what is the important thing for us, namely, that Orphism was a religion seeking consecration or the attainment of divine life, that it laid the

<sup>7</sup> Ancient authors who held this opinion include, Strabo, p. 330; Herod. ii 81; Eur. *Hippol.* 953; Apollod. I 3, 2; Diod. III 65; Plut. *Alex.* 2; Procl. *In Plat. Remp.* p. 398; Macrobian. *Sat.* I 18, 17; *In Somn. Scip.* I 12, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Cic. *De nat. deor.* I 38, 107: Orpheum poetam docet Aristoteles numquam fuisse, et hoc orphicum carmen Pythagorei ferunt cuiusdam fuisse Ceropis.—This text may signify that Orpheus never existed or merely that he was not a poet; the former is the interpretation generally accepted. See also Gruppe, in *Lex. d. griech. u. röm. Mythologie*, art. "Orpheus" and Monceaux, in *Dict. des Antiq.*, art. "Orpheus" and "Orphici"; Harrison, pp. 470ff.

<sup>9</sup> Ibyc. *fr.* 9 Bergk; Pind. *Pyth.* IV 716 (315).

<sup>10</sup> Suid. *s.v.* Ὀρφείας; Clem. Al. *Strom.* I 21; Paus. I 22, 7; etc.



greatest emphasis upon purity and purification and upon the blessed immortality to which they led, and that to this end a mode of life which was, theoretically at least, far more ascetic than anything which had yet appeared in Greece was taught.

It is in these doctrines that we are able to see the connection and also the profound differences between this religion and that of Dionysos. Both worshipped the same deity; both shared in beliefs which were not universally held by the Greeks; Orpheus passed as a reformer of the Dionysiac religion.<sup>11</sup> But "in the whole Church of Dionysos-Bacchos, the Orphics formed a mystic Church, an élite of the devout, for whom the essential thing was doctrine, purity of life, and preparation for death and future existences."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, though Orphism was born of the religion of Dionysos, the two were also very different. Nothing shows this better than the nature of the cult. While the worship of Dionysos encouraged tumultuous and ecstatic manifestations, the Orphics adopted the contrary attitude. In an inscription discovered on the Acropolis are preserved the rules of an Orphic sect; among the rules we read that "within the place of sacrifice no one is to make a noise . . . but each is to say his part in all quietness and order," and, moreover, if anyone does make a disturbance, he is to be taken out.<sup>13</sup> The Orphic cult was "a worship fair and orderly."<sup>14</sup> With the Orphics, the things of highest importance were doctrine and the observance of an ascetic life; as we shall see, their doctrine was a real contribution to the history of Greek thought, having had an enormous influence upon no less a thinker than Plato, and the mode of life which followed as a result of this doctrine was destined to no less important a rôle in subsequent his-

<sup>11</sup> Diod. III 65.

<sup>12</sup> Monceaux, *loc. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>13</sup> The inscription was published in *Ath. Mit.* xix (1894), p. 248.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Harrison, p. 476.

tory. As the whole formed a unified system, we must begin by a brief examination of the general theology of the Orphics.

The sources of our knowledge of Orphic doctrine are various, and of varying value. The best source is the literature which was produced by the sect; large numbers of poems, either cosmological, theological, mythological or liturgical, were written during the one thousand years which separated the fourth century A.D. from the sixth B.C., of which three complete works and numerous fragments still remain.<sup>15</sup> During the course of its history, Orphism was greatly influenced by various contemporary movements of thought, and unfortunately most of the literature which we now possess comes from the very end of the whole development. But on the other hand, the value of these late poems as illustrative of earlier thought has frequently been too greatly depreciated: several years ago a number of tablets of very thin gold were discovered in tombs in southern Italy, dating from the fourth or third century before our era, and inscribed with Orphic teachings;<sup>16</sup> previously these doctrines had been known only from writings coming from the fourth century A.D., so at a stroke their antiquity was augmented by 700 years. These tablets are our most important source for the earlier Orphism: as they were buried with the dead, the information they impart is chiefly eschatological, but there is much that is liturgical, and in either case, they well illustrate Orphic thought. In addition to these and the earlier portions of the Orphic poems, we have several passages, either expressly or obviously referring to Orphic beliefs and practices, in contemporary Greek literature. So taking what sources we have, let us attempt a brief sketch of Orphic theology.

<sup>15</sup> The three works are the *Argonautica*, *Lithica* and the *Orphic Hymns*; the fragments have been collected by Abel, *Orphica* (Leipzig, 1885) and Vari, *Nova Fragmenta Orphica* (Wien. Stud. XII, p. 222).

<sup>16</sup> See the textual discussion of these tablets by Gilbert Murray, in Harrison, *Prolegomena*, appendix, pp. 660-674.

To begin with, we must say that "the Orphic philosophy undertook to give an answer to the two great questions which tormented the Greek mind after the sixth century: an explanation of the world, and the destiny of man. On the one hand, the Orphics gave a cosmological and theological system, and on the other a metaphysical doctrine of the soul."<sup>17</sup> Into the details of their theogony and cosmogony it is not necessary for us to enter; it is sufficient to say that the earliest forms of these doctrines did not differ markedly from those of Hesiod on the same subject. In general, the whole thing, both theogony and cosmogony, is very confused, and it is hardly worth our while to attempt to unravel it.

Their anthropogony, however, is more important, for in this a belief fundamental to later asceticism, the dual nature of man, is very clearly stated. According to the myth, Dionysos was a favorite son of Zeus, but one day when he happened to be in the form of a bull, he was caught and torn to pieces by the wild Titans, themselves of divine ancestry, who thought to gain dominion over the world thus;<sup>18</sup> his heart alone was saved, which Zeus ate and presently brought forth a new Dionysos. But the Titans had to be punished, so Zeus destroyed them with his thunderbolt. From their ashes men were made. So to this day men are of a double nature: on the one hand they, like their ancestors, are of divine origin, but on the other hand, they are descended from the wicked Titans, and their forbears' sin is upon them. Like the Christians centuries later the Orphics believed, therefore, in the original divinity of man and in his fall, and in the doctrine of original sin. Pindar speaks of this fault as

<sup>17</sup> Monceaux, *loc. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>18</sup> The part which the old Dionysiac rite of tearing a bull asunder and eating its raw flesh, the Omophagia, had in the development of this myth has been shown by Miss Harrison (p. 495). The Orphic could not bring himself to give up the old savage rite of daubing himself with white clay and eating raw bulls, but he did invent a new myth to explain it and give it a high spiritual significance.

the παλαιὸν πένθος;<sup>19</sup> Jamblichus refers to it as the *μεγάλα ἁμαρτήματα*.<sup>20</sup> Before their fall the Titans had lived with the gods, but as a result of their sin, their descendants were exiled from this blissful abode, and condemned to terrestrial life. Though they retained their souls, the symbol of their divinity, a body was forced upon them, too, which is the sign of their fallen nature, and, as it were, the prison of the soul (body = *σῶμα*; prison = *σῆμα*).<sup>21</sup>

The soul, thanks to its divine nature, is immortal, and the hope is held out to it that it may at length regain its original state. The Orphic eschatology shows this very clearly. In the Orphic tablets and the "Nekyia" in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* (which was clearly of Orphic origin<sup>22</sup>), we have descriptions of the other world as they imagined it. In the latter, we read of the punishments of notorious sinners, such as Tantalus and Sisyphus; in the former we find directions for the pure as to how they are to proceed. Both from the tablets and other early Orphic literature it is evident that the two main features of their eschatology were the ideas of future rewards and punishments for acts committed in this life, and that of the transmigration of souls. If one strives earnestly to regain the primitive purity, he will succeed at last, and will then dwell forever in some Happy Isles, or perhaps in heaven itself; but until that time, he is doomed to pass from body to body, even entering animals. If his deeds during life are good, he will have a better host next time, but if they are bad, his next abode will be much worse.

<sup>19</sup> *Fr.* 110 Bergk.

<sup>20</sup> *Prot.* VIII 134.

<sup>21</sup> This idea is referred to the Orphics in Plato, *Cratyl.* 400c; cf. *Phaedr.* 62b; *Procl. In Plat. Remp.* 372; *Jambl. Prot.* VIII 134. The dual nature of man is illustrated by the Orphic tablet which makes the soul say, upon arriving in Hades (tr. Gilbert Murray, in Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 661):

"I am a child of Earth and Starry Heaven;

But my race is of Heaven alone."

<sup>22</sup> Dieterich, *Nekyia*, pp. 75ff.

This made up what they called the "circle of generation"; everyone should try to escape it and enter the Happy Isles, and the way to do so is to follow Orphic teaching.<sup>23</sup> Those who have read the early church Fathers will see that Origen, in his great work, *de Principiis*, did little more than copy this; nor was the influence of Orphic theology upon early Christians confined to Origen alone; its influence, direct and indirect, upon the development of Christian theology, was immense.<sup>24</sup>

These two ideas were fundamental to Orphic theology: the primitive purity and subsequent fall of man, and the possibility and desirability of regaining this purity; these were the ideas which were at the basis of their entire rule of life, and we shall see that this rule was a genuinely ascetic one. So purity was their goal, but how did they seek to attain it?

In the first place, all who wished to be pure had to have themselves initiated. Those who had been initiated called themselves the "Holy Ones" or the "Pure Ones": initiation by itself gave purification. After death those who had been

<sup>23</sup> These beliefs are well summed up in three of the Orphic tablets found at Compagno, which give the formula to be spoken by a "pure one" upon reaching Hades. Murray reconstructs the formula as follows (*l. c.*, p. 670):

"Out of the Pure I come, Pure Queen of Them Below,  
And Eukles and Euboleus, and other Gods and Demons:  
For I avow me that I am of your blessed race.  
And I have paid the penalty for deeds unrighteous,  
Whether it be that Fate laid me low or the Gods Immortal  
Or . . . with star-flung thunderbolt.  
I have flown out of the sorrowful weary Wheel;  
I have passed with eager feet to the Circle desired;  
I have sunk beneath the bosom of Despoina, Queen of the Under-world;  
I have passed with eager feet to (or from) the Circle desired;  
And now I come a suppliant to Holy Phersephoneia  
That of her grace she may receive me to the seats of the Hallowed.—  
Happy and Blessed One, thou shalt be God instead of Mortal."

<sup>24</sup> See Dieterich, *Nekyia, Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (1893, 2 ed., 1913).

initiated would receive a fairer fate than others, even in case they did not succeed in attaining heaven; while awaiting a new incarnation, they would enjoy a privileged lot in Hades. However, initiation by itself was not enough; it was also necessary to perform other purifications and fasts, to fulfil certain rites and follow a special regimen, and more than that, personal piety was also essential.

In describing the efforts of the Orphics to attain purity, we may begin by quoting two very important passages from Euripides. The first is a fragment of his lost *Cretans*, preserved by Porphyry; some one says:

“Robed in pure white, I have borne me clean  
From man’s vile birth and confined clay,  
And exiled from my lips alway  
Touch of all meat where Life hath been.”<sup>25</sup>

The second is less sympathetic; Theseus denounces the Orphic Hippolytos for his self-righteousness, crying:

“Now is the day! Now vaunt thee, thou so pure  
No flesh of life may pass thy lips! Now lure  
Fools after thee; call Orpheus King and Lord,  
Make ecstasies and wonders! Thumb thine hoard  
Of ancient rolls and ghostly mysteries.”<sup>26</sup>

Another illuminating passage is found in Aristophanes’s *Clouds*, in which the comedian deliberately parodies the Orphic mysteries. Old Strepsiades seeks Socrates, and finds him suspended in a basket—that he may be free of earthly things and give himself over entirely to heavenly ones!<sup>27</sup>

In these three passages the essentials of Orphic asceticism are observable: on the one hand, purity is sought by pure clothes, by keeping away from contaminating things and by eating cer-

<sup>25</sup> Tr. Miss Harrison.

<sup>26</sup> Eur. *Hipp.* 952ff. tr. Harrison.

<sup>27</sup> Ar. *Nub.* 223ff. That this scene parodies Orphic ritual is shown by Dieterich, *Rh. Mus.* 1893, pp. 275ff.; Harrison, pp. 512ff.

tain foods only; on the other is the more far-reaching proposition that all matter, and all material and worldly things are impure and consequently to be avoided. In the first place are the same old taboos which we have already found in primitive Greece: Herodotus tells us that the Orphics could not wear, or at least could not be buried in woollen clothes;<sup>28</sup> we read that eggs were forbidden them; like many other persons, they were careful not to pollute themselves by eating beans.<sup>29</sup> But even more important was their aversion to all flesh; this is explained by their belief in the transmigration of souls, which led one to believe that he might be eating a departed friend if he tasted meat. In all of these things, however, they differed from the other Greeks only in degree; the great contribution of the Orphics was their doctrine by which they rationalized these performances. By their depreciation of the body and of all matter generally, and by their emphasis upon spirit and mind and their divine nature,<sup>30</sup> they drew a sharp distinction between the real world and a spiritual world which they imagined; by their teaching of the infinite superiority of the latter—in fact, that the former had been created merely as a punishment for sin—they prepared the way for that “other-worldliness” which occupied so great a place in the religion of Europe for centuries to come. They clearly taught that the world was bad, and that if one would seek true and eternal felicity, he must forsake it, he must keep himself as pure as possible from this world of death which is a prison-house.

But their practice was not so rigorous as their teaching. They never went to the extremes of the Buddhist and Chris-

<sup>28</sup> Herod. II 81.

<sup>29</sup> δειλοί, πάνδειλα, κυάμων ἀπὸ χειρας ἔχεσθαι.—This sentiment is attributed by different authors to various persons, especially Pythagoras and Empedocles, but by some to Orpheus; see Diels, *Frg. d. Vorsok.* I 214, no. 141.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Procl. *ad Cratyl.* p. 82: ὁ ἐν ἡμῖν νοῦς Διονυσιακός ἐστιν καὶ ἀγαλλμα δυνως τοῦ Διονύσου.

tian ascetics, even though they did share their doctrine; abstention from flesh food was their most rigorous self-mortification. They fled the world in theory alone, and were consequently called hypocrites by some.

Nor was there, in a strict sense of the term, such a thing as an organized Orphic sect. There was a body of Orphic doctrine, whose limits were always vague and floating, and there were, in various parts of the Greek world, persons or groups of persons who accepted this doctrine, making more or less of an attempt to live according to it. But organized sect there was none: the doctrine, partly philosophical and scientific, partly theological and ascetical, the chief thing which actually existed. So Orphism was never so popular as the religion of Dionysos; according to the testimony of Plato, there were numbers of disreputable parsons who attached themselves to the movement and went around selling "purifications" and other quacks of one sort or another, but in the main Orphism appealed only to an élite.

Closely associated with Orphism was another movement of a very similar character, Pythagoreanism. This doctrine was founded by Pythagoras, who lived in southern Italy. It is said that he had been profoundly interested by Orphic thought, and it is certain that his system of speculation does present many points in common with Orphism. Chief among these are the doctrines of the transmigration of souls and asceticism, including abstinence from all flesh and beans. But Orphism knows nothing of the mathematics which was so important for Pythagoras, and it is doubtful whether the Orphics ever achieved an organization comparable to that of the Pythagoreans.

In regard to the doctrines of the early Pythagoreans, we are even worse off than for those of the Orphics: practically all we know of them is derived from writers who lived in the time of Christ or later (while Pythagoras lived five centuries before) and whose ideas were greatly influenced by the Neo-



Pythagoreans who flourished during the first centuries before and after the Christian era. By this time, ascetic thought had undergone a tremendous development in the Hellenistic world; also at this same time everybody was most anxious to attribute his ideas to some very ancient person. Consequently the various lives of Pythagoras merit little confidence.

But from the earliest sources still preserved, it is clear that the Pythagorean movement was largely religious. Its purpose seems to have been to give its members a more adequate satisfaction of their religious desires; it was for the "cultivation of holiness."<sup>31</sup> Also, it appears that Pythagoras "desired to effect, chiefly by the aid of religion, a reform of the moral life."<sup>32</sup> To this end, he developed still further the old idea taken over by the Orphics from the devotees of Dionysos, and taught that "men are in the image of God."<sup>33</sup> He made a rule of life,<sup>34</sup> which his followers should observe, and which has been summed up in the frequently quoted words *ἔπου θεῶν*;<sup>35</sup> to follow God and become like him is Pythagoras's highest ideal.<sup>36</sup>

In this rule of life, asceticism played a considerable rôle. Of course all that the Neo-Pythagoreans attributed to their hero is not to be accepted as historically true; these reports are frequently contradictory, as when Diogenes Laertius says in one place that he "knew neither love nor drunkenness," and a few pages later speaks of his wife.<sup>37</sup> One of our early authorities, Aristoxenos, is even quoted as saying that he preferred beans to every other vegetable;<sup>38</sup> but his prohibi-

<sup>31</sup> Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Zeller, *Philosophy of the Greeks to Socrates*, I 355.

<sup>33</sup> Themist. *Or.* xv 192b: *εἰκόνα πρὸς θεὸν εἶναι ἀνθρώπων*. = Clem. Al. *Strom.* v 55.

<sup>34</sup> Plato speaks of Pythagoras as the originator of *ἀδός τις βίου*, *Rep.* X 600b.

<sup>35</sup> Plut. *de Aud.* I 37; Clem. Al. *Str.* v 390D.

<sup>36</sup> Plut. *de Supers.* 9, 169.

<sup>37</sup> Diog. L. viii 19 *versus* 42. Cf. Clem. Al. *Str.* iii 435c.

<sup>38</sup> *Apud* Gell. iv 11, 5.

tion of them is so well attested that this statement must be set aside, unless, as has been suggested, there was a sacramental meal, to which Aristoxenos is confusedly referring, in which the sacred vegetable was solemnly eaten; but there is no other evidence for such a sacrament. In general, the things which Pythagoras tabooed were things which the Orphics had tabooed before him: in this side of his teaching he merely follows them, as is implied by Herodotus in the passage already quoted.<sup>39</sup> But from numerous passages in the Middle Comedy, it is evident that in the fourth century before Christ, there were plenty of people who practiced asceticism in his name.<sup>40</sup>

We have seen that the Orphics devoted considerable attention to speculation upon the world, and even to developing a philosophical theology. The Pythagoreans too devoted themselves to such speculations from the very first. It is not necessary to describe their elaborate number-philosophy here: Zeller has conclusively shown that the later ideas in regard to the One being God, spiritual and good, and the Dual being material and bad, do not date from the earliest times.<sup>41</sup> However, in the emphasis which they laid upon speculation (in which they followed and developed upon the Orphics), the early Pythagoreans did contribute to the development of ascetical thought. Pythagoras divided men into three classes, the *φιλόκερδεις*, or lovers of gain, the *φιλότιμοι*, or lovers of honor, and the *φιλόσοφοι*, or lovers of knowledge;<sup>42</sup> of these, only the last were really lofty persons. He also taught that scientific, and especially mathematical study is the best purifier of the soul; it is a means of escape from the "wheel." This idea runs through all the rest of Greek history, constantly developing, until we get to such persons

<sup>39</sup> Herod. ii 81.

<sup>40</sup> These are collected in Diels, *Frg. d. Vorsok.*, pp. 291ff.

<sup>41</sup> Zeller, *Op. cit.*, p. 397.

<sup>42</sup> Diog. Laer. viii 6.

as Apollonius of Tyana, who regarded themselves as successors of Pythagoras, and for whom the ideal wise man was wholly detached from the world. Early stages of this thought are found in Socrates, Plato and even Aristotle; it was upon this feature of Socrates's teaching that the Cynics fastened, and from them came the ideal of the Stoic sage and the Christian saint.<sup>43</sup> Here is the beginning of the tendency to turn from the things of "this world" to "higher" things, which is the essence of asceticism.

There is one other representative of this general movement who must be mentioned here, Empedocles. He is generally classed as a philosopher, but only a slight acquaintance with his thought is sufficient to show his close relations with the Orphics and Pythagoreans. It is said that in his youth he was affected by Orphism, and that at a later period he came under the influence of Pythagoras; one of the fragments, which refers to some great man in very glowing terms, is supposed to refer to him.<sup>44</sup> At any rate, he wrote a long poem with the good Orphic title "Purifications," several fragments of which have been preserved. In this, the doctrines of the fall of man, the body as a punishment, the transmigration of souls, purification by asceticism, and the possibility of final reconciliation with God are clearly taught. In the Introduction to his poem he says that there is a decree of Necessity that whoever of the demons polluted his hands with bloodshed or strife or perjury must leave the abode of the gods for three thousand seasons, passing from one form of mortal to another; such a one the author himself claims to be, an exile from God and a wanderer.<sup>45</sup> He says else-

<sup>43</sup> Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 89f.; *Greek Philosophy*, Part I p. 41.

<sup>44</sup> Frg. 129 Diels.

<sup>45</sup> Frg. 115: ἔστιν Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα . . .

εἴτε τις ἀμπλαγήσῃ φόνῳ φίλια γυῖα μῆνη,  
[Νείκεϊ δ'] ὅς κ(ε) ἐπιορκῶν ἀμαρτήσας ἐπομόσση,  
δαίμονες οὔτε μακραίωνος λελάχασι βίοιο

where "from what honor and from what length of bliss have I come to mortals, falling to earth,"<sup>46</sup> and again "I wept and wailed upon seeing this uninhabitable land,"<sup>47</sup> and "we have come into a roofed-over cave."<sup>48</sup> The body is an unnatural garment.<sup>49</sup> Men are in a fallen state. Closely connected with this is the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. "Already I have been a boy and a maiden, a bush, a bird and a mute fish in the sea."<sup>50</sup> Men are therefore related to animals, and the eating of flesh is consequently forbidden; "will you not stop this hateful slaughter? do you not see that you are eating one another in your thoughtlessness?"<sup>51</sup> In one fragment he attributes his then unhappy state to his having eaten flesh: "alas, that ruthless time did not destroy me before the abominable act of taking meat across my lips!"<sup>52</sup> But improvement is possible, and is to be accomplished by following the rule of life which he sets forth: "happy is he who possesses the riches of divine wisdom, but he is miserable to whom the doctrine is dark."<sup>53</sup> If people do follow this way of life, they shall at last "appear among mortal men as prophets, song-writers, physicians and princes; and thence they rise up as gods exalted in honor, sharing the hearth of the other gods and the same table, free from human woes, safe from destiny and incapable of hurt."<sup>54</sup>

*τρίς μιν μυρίας ὥρας ἀπὸ μακάρων ἀλάλησθαι,  
 φνομένους παντοῖα διὰ χρόνου εἶδεα θνητῶν  
 ἀργαλέας βίωτοιο μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους . . .  
 τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι, φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης,  
 Νείκεϊ μαινομένῳ πίσυνος.*

<sup>46</sup> Frg. 119.

<sup>47</sup> Frg. 118.

<sup>48</sup> Frg. 120.

<sup>49</sup> Frg. 126: *σαρκῶν ἀλλογνῶτι περιστέλλουσα χιτῶνι.*

<sup>50</sup> Frg. 117.

<sup>51</sup> Frg. 136.

<sup>52</sup> Frg. 139.

<sup>53</sup> Frg. 132: *ὀλβιος, ὃς θείων πραπίδων ἐκτήσατο πλοῦτον,  
 δειλὸς δ', ᾧ σκοτόεσσα θεῶν περὶ δόξα μέμηλεν.*

<sup>54</sup> Frgg. 146-7.

In the rule of life which he laid down, ascetic features were prominent. Not only did he forbid flesh food, but he also placed a taboo upon beans<sup>55</sup> and laurel.<sup>56</sup> In these things he is merely following the model of the old injunctions for purity which dated from the most primitive times. But he also tended to put a spiritual interpretation upon some of them: thus he said, "Fast from evil."<sup>57</sup> Finally, he says in one of the fragments of his other poem that the four roots of all things are Zeus, Hera, Aidoneus (*i. e.*, Hades) and a goddess named Nestis, "Fasting," "who moistens with tears the well-spring of mortals."<sup>58</sup> Diogenes explains these elements as fire, earth, air and water,<sup>59</sup> but why Empedocles raised an otherwise unknown goddess of this ascetic name to so important a place is not clear, unless it be that he wished to emphasize the ascetic exercise whose name she bore. It has been suggested that she was some form of an oriental goddess, for example, Isis weeping for Osiris, or perhaps that she was connected with the Adonis myth.<sup>60</sup> In this case we would have a Greek thinker at least giving recognition to a myth which teaches one of the most highly spiritualized forms of asceticism: the doctrine of purification or forgiveness after mere weeping and sorrow. This interpretation of Empedocles's remark, however, is only hypothetical.

As we pointed out at the opening of the present section, the people who were interested in the movements which we have

<sup>55</sup> Frg. 141.

<sup>56</sup> Frg. 140.

<sup>57</sup> Frg. 144: *νηστεύσαι κακότητος*.

<sup>58</sup> Frg. 6. *τέσσαρα γὰρ πάντων ριζώματα πρῶτον ἄκουε* ·

*Ζεὺς ἀργῆς Ἥρη τε φερέσβιος ἦδ' Ἀιδωνεύς*

*Νῆστις δ' ἥ δακρύοις τέγγει κροῦνῳμα βρότειον*.

<sup>59</sup> Diog. Laër. viii 76: *Δία μὲν τὸ πῦρ λέγων, Ἥρην δὲ τὴν γῆν, Ἀιδονέα δὲ τὸν αἶρα, Νῆστιν δὲ τὸ ὕδωρ*. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 264n. argues that Diogenes has mixed these, and that Zeus is really the air and Hades fire; this seems very plausible.

<sup>60</sup> See Dieterich, on Hilgenfeld, *Die Grabinschrift des Aberkios erläutert*, in *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift*, 1897, p. 394.

just been describing were probably descended from the old population, and who had been able to raise their status and intelligence somewhat (but not too much) thanks to the economic developments of the seventh and sixth centuries; their religion was largely a continuation and a development of the primitive rites of purification which we described in the first section of our essay. But at the same time there were other streams of thought in Greece, to the eminent representatives of which the title of philosopher is generally given. We must not assume, however, that there was absolutely no interaction between the two schools: on the contrary there seems to have been a good deal of it. Nevertheless, it is generally possible to distinguish them, because after all, their thought was quite different, and appealed to different classes of persons. In Periclean times, the Orphics were not very high-class persons, but the sophists were.

That this distinction was not a hard and fast one, and not always even a possible one, is shown in the first place by the fact that the early philosophers, Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, etc., were influenced to a considerable extent by Orphism, and that it in its turn was influenced by them,<sup>61</sup> and in the second place by the fact that it is not always possible to say which group a given man belongs to: thus we have classed Pythagoras and Empedocles in the "Orphic" group, though they are generally called philosophers, and other sides of their doctrine, which we have ignored, certainly entitle them to such a name. But in general the philosophers paid but little attention to the old beliefs about purification and fasting and asceticism; the most that they did was to develop doctrines which were later utilized for this purpose by others. Heraclitus was one of the few who did mention

<sup>61</sup> Rob. Eisler, *Weltmantel und Himmelszelt*, ii pp. 661ff., 693-706; Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*, chap. vi; Kern, in *Hermes*, xxv 1ff.; Diels, in *Archiv f. Gesch. d. Phil.*, ii 91ff.; Burnet, *op. cit.*, index s.v. *Orphics*.

these purifications, and what he said was "those who when stained purify themselves with blood do as if some one who had stepped into the mud should wash himself with mud."<sup>62</sup>

These pre-Socratic philosophers did render one service, however. They supplied the word asceticism. The original meaning of the word *ἀσκεῖν*, as used by Homer, was to "work" or "fashion" raw materials. Thus he speaks of "working" wool (*ῥσκέειν εἴρια*, γ388) and of "worked" yarn (*νῆμα ἀσκητός*, Δ134). From this was derived a secondary meaning, to work upon oneself, that is, to "practice" or "exercise" and especially to "train." Now from the days of Hesiod, it had been taught in Greece that virtue could be attained only by labor.<sup>63</sup> Democritus gave the name *ἄσκησις* to this sort of labor. While he also uses the word in other senses,<sup>64</sup> he says in one passage that "more are good from training, asceticism (*ἄσκησις*), than nature."<sup>65</sup> Similarly Protagoras says that "one should receive education from nature and training."<sup>66</sup> This was therefore the meaning of the word "asceticism" when it was first introduced into the vocabulary of philosophy.

<sup>62</sup> Frg. 5 Diels.

<sup>63</sup> Hes. *Op.* 287ff.: Τὴν μὲν τοι κακότητα καὶ ἱλαδὸν ἔστιν ἐλέσθαι

ῥηιδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει·

τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἰδρώτα θεοὶ προπάρουθεν ἔθηκαν

ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ θροῖος οἶμος ἐς αὐτῆν

καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὴν δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται,

ῥηιδίη δὴ ἔπειτα πέλει, χαλεπή περ ἐοῦσα.

<sup>64</sup> Thus in one place (frg. 110), he uses it in conjunction with *λόγος* for "to talk." The same meaning of "use" is given the word in frg. 53a.

<sup>65</sup> Frg. 242: πλέονες ἐξ ἀσκήσιος ἀγαθοὶ γίγονται ἢ ἀπὸ φύσιος.

<sup>66</sup> Frg. 3: φύσεως καὶ ἀσκήσεως διδασκαλία δέιται. Cf. frg. 10; Critias, frg. 9. Cf. Capelle, in *Neue Jahrb. f. kl. Alt.*, 25 (1910), p. 697, n. 2.

## CHAPTER III

### ASCETICISM IN PLATO

The preceding chapters of this essay have been devoted to a study of the ascetic features of the religion of early Greece. We have found numerous interdictions of the most elementary sort, greatly resembling the taboos found among all primitive peoples; we have seen that any approach of such interdicted things to a person polluted that person; he who would remain pure had to keep away from them. It has also been seen that a person polluted in this way had to undergo purifications which were sometimes of a most stringent sort, demanding acts of veritable asceticism. An unusual degree of purity was demanded before important religious acts, the attainment of which required, at times, fasting and continence. It has been seen, too, that back of practices was a belief in evil spirits, which were supposed to reside in the tabooed things, and which attached themselves to a person's body whenever they got a chance, polluting it and thus making it impossible for that person to approach sacred things; back of the whole thing, therefore, was a division of the world, or at least of the spiritual world, into two parts, one good and the other bad, one *fas* and the other *nefas*, and the belief that these two worlds, or two orders of spirits were so radically heterogeneous that they could not even approach one another. As to the why and the wherefore of all this, these primitive peoples did not ask; persons in their intellectual stage seem to take it pretty much for granted.

During the seventh and sixth centuries, however, a new religious movement came over Greece, which was marked by the appearance of new cults, and which showed a great ad-



vance in the religious development of Greece. One example of these new cults is found in Orphism. The followers of this religion retained the old rites and purifications and abstinences, but explained them by the theological system which we outlined above: a theory of the world was drawn up which made asceticism seem not only a natural but also a highly desirable thing.

But there is still a third stage in the evolution of early Greek ascetical thought, and after that, as will be seen, there was very little for succeeding generations to add. This third stage is found in the asceticism of Plato; in it, the ascetic tendencies which we have been studying were united and clarified and reduced to a theory, and this theory so closely united with the then universally accepted theory of the world, that Plato's thought remained the source from which ascetical theologians drew their doctrines for centuries to come. It is therefore of the highest importance for us to understand Plato's doctrine on the subject. But this portion of his philosophy is so closely related to all the rest, and his whole philosophy is in a way so much the product of his time, that we must have these accompanying features clearly in mind before turning to his strictly ascetical thought.

The gradual expansion of Greece during the eighth and following centuries, and the effect which this had upon the development of Greek religion and thought, have already been noted. In the fifth century this process continued at an even more rapid rate, and at the same time numerous internal causes cooperated to bring about even greater upheavals in Greece. As the present study is not a social history of Greece, there is no need for describing these developments in detail, and it will be sufficient to say that after the times of Marathon and Salamis, new tendencies appeared and nothing was ever quite the same in Greece again. The old petty rivalries of the city-states tended to be forgotten to a certain extent, and the new ideal of Hellas began to arise; the isolated agri-

cultural communities began to break up, and with them departed the old superstitions which had formerly bound men; an era of enlightenment ensued—an era to which no parallel can be found previous to the nineteenth century. The new demands for education brought into being a new class of men, called Sophists, whose business it was to impart this education. During the fifth century, these sophists were the intellectual leaders of Greece, and it was their liberalizing instruction which brought about the intellectual revolution of the century—it is a most noteworthy fact that the true nature of the sophists was first recognized, and that they were first raised from the general opprobrium to which Plato's diatribes had consigned them for a period of over two thousand years, by a historian, Grote, who was himself a radical of much the same sort, and that the most brilliant account of their work which we possess was written by another still more radically-minded thinker, Gilbert Murray.<sup>1</sup> It is hard for us to imagine the revolutionary effect which this teaching must have had upon Greece, and particularly upon Athens, but as it is hard to find anything that was immune from their criticism, its consequences must indeed have been far-reaching: when Protagoras taught that "man is the measure of all things," pretty much all the old moral values must already have been overthrown. The sophists at least brought intellectual freedom, but perhaps they brought anarchy too. Then came the Peloponnesian War, and Athens was defeated. In spite of her freedom, in spite of her enlightenment, in spite of her culture, in spite of her lofty ideals, such as those expressed in Pericles's funeral oration, Athens was defeated. Though no doubt her soldiers were just as brave and just as strong as her enemies', something was wrong; some people laid this to the work of the sophists, which, they claimed, had weakened Athens. Perhaps they were right, too; perhaps

<sup>1</sup> Grote, *History of Greece*, chap. lvii; Murray, *Euripides and his Age*, pp. 44–58 and *passim*.

the sophists were partially to blame for the eternal quibbling which was Athens's ruin; perhaps it is true that the ideals which they taught, though lofty, were 'machtlos,' were unable to inspire men to put forth their best efforts, to sacrifice anything and everything for their sake, and that from that ultra-pragmatic point of view which teaches that truth is not only what 'works' but also what makes us work, they were deficient. At any rate, as soon as the war was over, it became evident that further intellectual reform was an urgent necessity, and at just this moment Plato appeared.

Plato was descended from one of the old aristocratic families of Athens,<sup>2</sup> and of his loyalty to his city, we can have no doubt. The old story of the heroic deeds of the Athenians in times forgotten, which he relates at the beginning of the *Timaeus*, is a proof of this. In one passage<sup>3</sup> he speaks very highly of Isocrates, singling him out from among all the sophists as one who might eventually come to be something, which might suggest that Plato was interested in the pan-Hellenism of the fourth century, of which Isocrates was so eminent an advocate, but in any case his first loyalty was always to Athens. He was not blind to the faults of her citizens, and was perfectly willing to criticise many of the things which they held dear, but notwithstanding this, passages too numerous to mention, in which he speaks of her beauty and grandeur, should convince us that the fate of Athens was always near his heart. But, as has been pointed out, Athens had just been defeated; this fact, and his love for his city, were the main-springs of all Plato's activity. His great purpose in all his work was to rehabilitate the city in its ancient splendor, and to make possible once more that former glory, which now seemed to be gone. Our first witness is the attention he gave to political philosophy, and his efforts

<sup>2</sup> See Plato's genealogy, given in Burnet, *Greek Philosophy from Thales to Plato*, Part I, p. 351.

<sup>3</sup> *Phaedr.* 279.

to conceive an ideal state which would point out to his fellow-citizens how to make their city great again; the attention he gives to defenders, to military preparedness, shows where his real interest lay. Again, his antipathy to the sophists is thus explained; others at the time were blaming them for Athens's weakness, and it is probably the case that Plato, too, all unconsciously perhaps,<sup>4</sup> felt that they, and especially their damnable teaching, were to blame for his city's fall, and that he hated them accordingly. At any rate, his onslaught upon their ideas is enough to show that he felt that it was a matter of the highest concern that they should be refuted; why was he so zealous in this, if not that he thought that it would do some good to somebody?

It was a firm belief of Plato, and of the Greeks in general, that to act rightly, one must think correctly, that right thinking precedes right acting: if men do wrong, it is because they think wrong. Thus Plato says that "no man is voluntarily bad; but the bad become bad by reason of an ill disposition of the body and bad education." Consequently, if one would improve morally, he should improve himself intellectually; a few lines below, Plato continues, "we should endeavour as far as we can by education, and studies, and learning, to avoid vice and attain virtue."<sup>5</sup> It is no wonder, then, that when Plato set out to better the condition of his city, he first attacked what he considered a vicious philosophy and then urged the study of true philosophy. Let us see exactly what he wished to reform.

The sophists had been radical empiricists: they had maintained that nothing existed which could not be perceived by the senses. Thus Protagoras taught that "man is the measure of all things." Carried into the moral field, this doc-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Rep.* VI 492, where it is denied that the sophists were corruptors of youth. But cf. the parable of the mutinous crew (§ 488) which is rather obviously directed at the Athenians, and especially the spirit of the sophists.

<sup>5</sup> *Tim.* 86, 87. Here, as elsewhere, Jowett's translation is followed.

trine led to a denial of the existence of moral ideals, goodness, justice and the like; Euripides was then able to say that "nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." It was this denial of the real existence of ideals which aroused Plato's greatest antagonism, and we shall see that his affirmation of their real and absolute existence is the very heart of his philosophy.

There was a second doctrine which was a particular abomination to Plato: this was Heraclitus's teaching that nothing is stationary, but that everything flows. In Plato's day, it was only too obvious a fact that everything was changing, and this was the cause of his concern. It was true that many things, yes, all visible things did change incessantly, but Plato would not admit that there was absolutely nothing stable, nothing enduring in the whole universe. When this doctrine of eternal change was applied to everything—to the ideals of the good, the true, the beautiful, and the like—people were going too far, it seemed, and Plato protested. If there really were nothing constant and in the world, then science, knowledge, learning from experience, law, justice, and society itself would be impossible, and perhaps the then unhappy state of the Athenians was due to their great desire for change. Plato, on the other hand, held that there was much that was desirable in the past, and tried to show that there were things which were unchanging.

This leads us to a third point: the sophists, like the philosophers who preceded them, had but little respect for the religion of the past—as was but natural. But this did not seem quite right to Plato either. To be sure, he would have been glad enough to get rid of the Olympians and their *chronique scandaleuse*, but it seemed to him that there was much that was worth preserving in the old religion of his people. There is a sort of piety that runs through the dialogues which is hardly what we should expect from the rationalizing and empirical sophists—"I too believe that the gods are our guar-

dians, and that we are a possession of theirs," said Socrates.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in certain portions of his work, the influence of old Orphic ideas is very marked: it will presently be seen that his doctrine of asceticism was taken over from them almost *en bloc*. It should be remembered, also, that his teacher Socrates had been identified with the Orphics by Aristophanes, in his *Clouds*, so it may be that Plato got these ideas from his master. At any rate, there will be numerous occasions for showing his close affinity with the Orphics.

These two points—the existence of unchanging ideals and the return to Orphism—might lead one to suppose that it is our intention to show that Plato wished to return to the "good old times" before the sophists came and upset things, but this is not at all the case: no one could maintain that the author of the *Republic* was a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary. In fact, it is only after the criticism of the sophists that Plato could think for a minute of accepting the old Orphic tales: of course they were not true, and so long as any one was in danger of taking them as such, it would be impossible to make any use of them. But when he is sure that nobody will take them literally, when all will agree with him that one cannot "affirm that this is exactly true—a man of sense ought hardly to say that," then he can approach them with a free mind and find a valuable lesson in them. Plato is able to say, for example, that "he was not a bad genealogist who said that Iris the messenger of heaven is the child of Thaumas (wonder),"<sup>7</sup> and on other occasions to call upon them for more important contributions than that, but this was possible only after the negative criticism of the sophists. As an eminent French critic has remarked, "sans Voltaire, Renan était impossible. Il a fallu nier avec colère avant de pouvoir nier avec sympathie. Il fallait que le pouvoir de l'Église fût détruit, pour qu'on pût rendre justice à la religion sans y croire."<sup>8</sup> That is just what Plato did.

<sup>6</sup> *Phaed.* 62.

<sup>7</sup> *Theaet.* 155.

<sup>8</sup> Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française*, p. 772.

These preliminary remarks should enable us to understand the real nature of Plato's philosophy. While there is no need to go into details about the logic of Plato's system of ideas, it must be briefly outlined, if we are to understand his "other-worldliness," which was at the foundation of his doctrine of asceticism.

The fundamental doctrine in Plato's entire system is the real existence of ideals, that is, of an absolute good, an absolute justice, etc. "There is nothing which to my mind is so evident as that beauty, good and other notions have a most real and absolute existence."<sup>9</sup> The ideas which we have of such things are at best but feeble copies of these: "there is no light in the earthly copies of justice or temperance or any of the other higher qualities which are precious to souls: they are seen but through a glass dimly; and there are few who, going to the images, behold in them the realities, and they with difficulty."<sup>10</sup> The feeble copies of these ideas which are in our own minds bear the same relation to the absolute ideas that a reflection in water or a looking-glass does to the object reflected.<sup>11</sup> So far, Platonic ideas are seen to be only really-existing ideals, things whose existence some persons would deny ("the uninitiated, who believe in nothing but what they hold fast in their hands"<sup>12</sup>); Plato maintained that they really did exist as absolute ideas. But he did not stop there. He went on, and spoke of the idea of a shuttle<sup>13</sup> or a bed,<sup>14</sup> and even spoke of the "pattern" which "the artificer had in view when he made the world."<sup>15</sup> But this was only an extension of the doctrine; the heart of it, and nearly all the examples, relate to moral entities, or as we should say, to ideals.

<sup>9</sup> *Phaed.* 77.

<sup>10</sup> *Phaedr.* 249.

<sup>11</sup> *Rep.* VI 515.

<sup>12</sup> *Theaet.* 155.

<sup>13</sup> *Cratyl.* 393.

<sup>14</sup> *Rep.* X 596.

<sup>15</sup> *Tim.* 29.

Thus he arrives at the conception of a dual world: the sensible or visible world, and the world of ideas, or the intelligible world. But the intelligible world is not only the world of ideas; it is also the world of changeless things; moreover, it is the only real world. "That which is apprehended by reflection and reason always is, and is the same; that, on the other hand, which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is in a process of becoming and perishing, but never really is."<sup>16</sup> So there can be no doubt as to the infinite superiority of the intelligible world over the sensible one, and the highest aspiration that a man can have is to live in this other, superior, ideal world.

"This is that life above all others which a man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute; a beauty which if you once beheld, you would see not to be after the measure of gold, and garments, and fair boys and youths, which when you now behold you are in fond amazement, and you and many a one are content to live seeing only and conversing with them without meat or drink, if that were possible. . . . In that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities. . . . Would that be an ignoble life?"<sup>17</sup>

But how is a man to live this life "in the contemplation of beauty absolute"? This leads us to a discussion of Plato's anthropology. Like the world, man is dual: just as "the seen is the changing and the unseen the unchanging," so "the soul is more like the unseen, and the body to the seen."<sup>18</sup> "The soul is the very likeness of the divine and immortal, and intelligible, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and the body is the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintelligible, and multiform, and dissoluble and changeable."<sup>19</sup> Thus we find the two parts of man, the soul

<sup>16</sup> *Tim.* 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Symp.* 211-2.

<sup>18</sup> *Phaed.* 79.

<sup>19</sup> *Phaed.* 80.



and the body, of which the soul is unquestionably the superior part; it would be better if the body could be dispensed with altogether.

"The soul is dragged by the body into the region of the changeable, and wanders and is confused; the world spins round her, and she is like a drunkard when under their [the senses'] influence. . . . But when returning into herself she reflects, then she passes into the realm of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives, when she is by herself and is not let or hindered; then she ceases from her erring ways, and being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging."<sup>20</sup>

The similarity with Orphic views is obvious here, but it becomes still more so if we turn to his theory of how the soul came to be in the body, for he, as they, believed in a Fall and that the body is a punishment. He speaks of a former "state of innocence, shining in pure light, pure ourselves and not yet enshrined in that living tomb which we carry about, now that we are imprisoned in the body, as in an oyster-shell. Let me linger thus long over the memory of scenes that have passed away."<sup>21</sup>

Connected with this is his further acceptance of the Orphic doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Like the Orphics, Plato believed not only in rewards and punishments after death for acts committed during this life—"for I have good hope that there is yet something remaining for the dead, and as has been said of old, something far better for the good than for the evil"<sup>22</sup>—but he also believed in the transmigration of souls into higher or lower animals, or else advance to fellowship with the gods after death: low persons after death enter into asses, wolves, etc., "but he who is a philosopher or lover of learning, and is entirely pure at departing, is alone

<sup>20</sup> *Phaed.* 79.

<sup>21</sup> *Phaedr.* 250.

<sup>22</sup> *Phaed.* 83, cf. 107ff., esp. 113.

permitted to reach the gods.”<sup>23</sup> I am “persuaded,” says Socrates, “that I am going to other gods who are wise and good (of this I am as certain as I can be of anything of the sort), and to men departed (though I am not so certain of this) and are better than those whom I leave behind.”<sup>24</sup> In the *Phaedrus*, again, he develops at length his theory of the Fall from seeing the truth, the struggle to attain that happy state again, and the passage, meantime, through various animals: ordinary people will return to their former state of bliss after 10,000 years, but lovers and philosophers after only 3,000.<sup>25</sup>

This gives us a hint as to what Plato considered the way of progress, the way to purify oneself and return to one's original exalted state, as to what he considered man's highest activity: this was philosophic speculation. In good Greek wise, he held that the only way to have one act correctly was to have him think correctly, whence the great emphasis he placed upon philosophy: teaching this was, according to his opinion, the only way to improve men. Therefore he requires that the guardians of his ideal state shall be philosophers: it is the highest form of activity which any man can follow: the finer sort of minds identify wisdom and the good.<sup>26</sup> This is the ultimate standard of value: “is there not one coin for which all things ought to exchange?—that is wisdom; and only in exchange for this, and in company with this, is anything truly bought or sold, whether courage or temperance or justice.”<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, he says that “the study of philosophy is the noblest and best music.”<sup>28</sup> “For ‘many,’ as they say in the mysteries, ‘are the thyrsus-bearers, but few are the mystics,’—meaning, as I interpret the words,

<sup>23</sup> *Phaed.* 81.

<sup>24</sup> *Phaed.* 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Phaedr.* 248–9.

<sup>26</sup> *Rep.* VI 505.

<sup>27</sup> *Phaed.* 69.

<sup>28</sup> *Phaed.* 61.

the true philosophers.”<sup>29</sup> Phaedrus is made to say, “What motive has a man to live if not for the pleasures of discourse? Surely he would not live for the sake of bodily pleasures, which are rightly called slavish.”<sup>30</sup>

“And therefore the mind of the philosopher alone has wings; and this is just, for he is always, according to the measure of his abilities, clinging in recollection to those things in which God abides, and in believing which he is what he is. And he who employs aright these memories is ever being initiated into perfect mysteries and alone becomes perfect. But as he forgets earthly interests and is rapt in the divine, the vulgar deem him mad, and rebuke him; they do not see that he is inspired.”<sup>31</sup>

But, after all, the best proof of what Plato thought of philosophers and their work is shown by the glorious future which he promised them.

“He who has lived as a true philosopher has reason to be of good cheer when he is about to die, and after death he may hope to receive the greatest good in the other world.”<sup>32</sup>

“Those who are remarkable for having led holy lives are released from this earthly prison, and go to their pure home, which is above, and dwell in the purer earth; and those who have duly purified themselves with philosophy live henceforth altogether without the body, in mansions fairer far than these, which may not be described, and of which time would fail me to tell. . . . I do not mean to affirm that the description which I have given of the soul and her mansions is exactly true—a man of sense ought hardly to say that. But I do say that, inasmuch as the soul is shown to be immortal, he may venture to think, not improperly or unworthily, that something of the kind is true. The adventure is a glorious one, and he ought to comfort himself with words like these, which is the reason why I lengthen out the tale. Wherefore, I say, let a man be of good cheer about his soul, who

<sup>29</sup> *Phaed.* 69.

<sup>30</sup> *Phaedr.* 258.

<sup>31</sup> *Phaedr.* 249.

<sup>32</sup> *Phaed.* 64.

has cast away the pleasures and ornaments of the body as alien to him, and rather hurtful in their effects, and has followed after the pleasures of knowledge in this life; who has adorned the soul in her own proper jewels, which are temperance, and justice, and courage, and truth—in these arrayed she is ready to go on her journey to the world below, when her time comes.”<sup>33</sup>

But it must not be assumed that everybody was supposed to be a philosopher, or even could be one: only a chosen few might aspire to such a rank. Others, if they attempted philosophy, would only degrade it, as the sophists did: “all those mercenary adventurers, whom the world calls Sophists and rivals, do but teach the collective opinion of the many, which are the opinions of their assemblies; and this is their wisdom.”<sup>34</sup> “The world cannot possibly be a philosopher? Impossible. And therefore philosophers must inevitably fall under the censure of the world? They must.”<sup>35</sup> All cannot be philosophers, but he that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

Such, then, seem to have been the fundamental concepts of Plato’s philosophy: the real existence of ideas, and particularly of ideals, which form a separate and superior world, and which are known by the mind alone; the inability of most people to see these clearly, or at all; the ability of the philosopher to see them, and the joy which this gives him, both here and hereafter. Let us see how all this is connected with his asceticism.

In the first place, we must point out that though there are many passages, some of which we shall quote, which teach a depreciation of the body, there are also many which encourage its development, which teach the ideal of a “mens sana in corpore sano.” He never criticises gymnastics, but he frequently does praise them: “that is the best of the purifications of the body which is effected by gymnastic.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Phaed.* 115.

<sup>34</sup> *Rep.* VI 493.

<sup>35</sup> *Rep.* 494.

<sup>36</sup> *Tim.* 89.

"But the fair mind in the fair body will be the fairest and loveliest sight to him who has the seeing eye. . . . [To attain ~~this~~] we should not move the body without the soul or the soul without the body, and thus they will aid one another and be healthy and well balanced. And therefore the mathematician or anyone else who devotes himself to some intellectual pursuit, must allow his body to have motion also, and practice gymnastic; and he who would train the limbs of his body, should impart to them the motions of the soul, and should practice music and all philosophy, if he would be called truly fair and truly good."<sup>37</sup>

These passages are enough to show that Plato did not share in that hatred of the body which many ascetics have sought to show, and that he would never have sanctioned mutilations and the other excessive penances which have at times been inflicted upon the body. None of the texts cited below demand much more than that the body be kept in its proper place, and that the philosopher attach no value to it.

But notwithstanding all this, one should never forget that "the beauty of the mind is more honorable than the beauty of outward form."<sup>38</sup> One must remember that "in the region above the heavens is the place of true knowledge,"<sup>39</sup> and that "no impure thing is allowed to approach the pure."<sup>40</sup> Moreover, "what is purification but the separation of the soul from the body—but the release of the soul from the chains of the body? And the true philosophers, and they only, study and are eager to release the soul."<sup>41</sup>

"The soul which is pure at departing draws after her no bodily taint, having never voluntarily had connection with the body, which she is ever avoiding, herself gathered into herself; (for such abstraction has been the study of her life). And what does

<sup>37</sup> *Tim.* 88.

<sup>38</sup> *Symp.* 210.

<sup>39</sup> *Phaedr.* 247.

<sup>40</sup> *Phaed.* 67.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

this mean but that she has been a true disciple of philosophy, and has practiced how to die easily?"<sup>42</sup>

After death "the foolishness of the body will be cleared away and we shall be pure and hold converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere; and this is surely the light of truth."<sup>43</sup>

"While we are in the body, and while the soul is mingled with this mass of evil, our desire will not be satisfied, and our desire is of the truth. For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and also is liable to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after truth: and by filling us as full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies, and idols, and every sort of folly, prevents our ever having, as people say, so much as a thought."<sup>44</sup>

This reminds one of the old Orphic doctrine that the body is evil, that it is a punishment, that it is a tomb. In fact, in one place Socrates is made to say that "there is a doctrine uttered in secret that man is a prisoner; this is a great mystery which I do not quite understand."<sup>45</sup> The body is a hindrance to the philosopher.

Finally, there are a certain number of passages which describe even more clearly the disregard which the true philosopher will have for all things connected with the body. I will quote two of them.

"He whose desires are drawn towards knowledge in every form will be absorbed in the pleasures of the soul, and will hardly feel bodily pleasure—I mean, if he be a true philosopher and not a sham one. Such a one is sure to be temperate and the reverse of covetous; for the motives which make other men covetous and also profuse in expenditure, are no part in his character."<sup>46</sup>

"Do you think that the philosopher ought to care about the

<sup>42</sup> *Phaed.* 80.

<sup>43</sup> *Phaed.* 67.

<sup>44</sup> *Phaed.* 66.

<sup>45</sup> *Phaed.* 62.

<sup>46</sup> *Rep.* VI 485.

pleasures—if they are to be called pleasures—of eating and drinking?

“Certainly not, answered Simias.

“And what do you say about the pleasures of love—should he care about them?

“By no means.

“And will he think much of the other ways of indulging the body, for example the acquisition of costly raiment, or sandals, or other adornments of the body? Instead of caring about them, will he not rather despise anything more than nature needs? What do you say?

“I should say that the true philosopher would despise them.

“Would you not say that he is entirely concerned with the soul and not with the body? He would like, so far as he can, to be quit of the body and turn to the soul.

“That is true.

“In matters of this sort philosophers, above all other men, may be observed in every sort of way to dis sever the soul from the body.

“That is true.

“Whereas, Simmias, the rest of the world are of the opinion that a life which has no bodily pleasures and no part in them is not worth having; but that he who thinks nothing of bodily pleasures is almost as though he were dead.

“That is quite true.

“What again shall we say of the actual acquirement of knowledge?—is the body, if invited to share in the inquiry, a hinderer or a helper? I mean to say, have sight and hearing any truth in them? Are they not, as the poets are always telling us, inaccurate witnesses? and yet, if even they are inaccurate and indistinct, what is to be said of the other senses?—for you will allow that they are the best of them?

“Certainly, he replied.

“Then when does the soul attain truth?—for in attempting to consider anything in company with the body, she is obviously deceived.

“Yes, that is true.

“And thought is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her—neither sounds nor sights nor pains nor pleasures—when she has as little as possible to do with the body, and has no bodily sense or feeling, but is aspiring after being?”

“And in this the philosopher dishonors the body; his soul runs away from the body and desires to be alone and by herself?”

“That is true.”<sup>47</sup>

In these passages, at last, we come to a truly ascetic ideal. Here, at last, is that complete inversion of the ordinary values of the world which is known as asceticism. Here is described the ideal sage, rising above the cares and worries, and also above the pleasures and delights of this world, that he may give himself over completely to the contemplation of higher things. Here, too, is the teaching that man's highest and noblest activity is pure speculation. And this speculation is not merely noble, but is also useful: the most important men in the state were to be the philosophers. The greatest service is not rendered by those who busy themselves with the affairs of this world, but by those who spend their lives in the contemplation of beauty absolute and absolute truth and all the other absolute ideas, and who pass down to their fellowmen the truths thus learned—they also serve who only sit and think, so the ascetic does not live in vain.

In the preceding sections of our essay it has been shown how the idea arose among the Greeks that there were certain things which it was better not to do, even though they appeared to be harmless enough in themselves: we have seen the old beliefs in evil demons which inhabited certain things, which should therefore be avoided; we have seen how the progress of intelligence made these old beliefs less readily tenable, and how a new interpretation of them became necessary, which taught the radical dualism of soul and body, with the great superiority of the former, and the implication that

<sup>47</sup> *Phaed.* 64–5.



restraining the latter raised the former to a more perfect state; we now come to the consummation of this whole development. Perhaps we should have noticed certain contributions of the pre-Socratic philosophers: of Heraclitus who taught that Logos, Reason, ruled everything,<sup>48</sup> and of Anaxagoras, who is said to have been the first to distinguish between spirit and matter;<sup>49</sup> probably these thinkers had a certain influence upon Plato, too. We have also attempted to sketch the social and intellectual conditions which led Plato to take the attitude he did, and to lay such stress upon these ideas which, he taught, had a real and absolute existence. So we at last arrived at Plato's teaching of a superior and invisible world which is known by the mind alone, but which is so far superior to the sensible world that all who can should stop bothering greatly about the affairs of this lower sphere, and seek only the joys and pleasures of the world above. And finally, we saw how this doctrine led Plato to make statements which have a genuinely ascetic ring.

Later thinkers had but little to add. Aristotle took over the conception that man's highest activity is pure speculation: "perfect happiness is a species of speculative activity;" "animals, as being perfectly destitute of such activity, do not participate in happiness." "We conclude then that happiness is coextensive with speculation, and that the greater a person's power of speculation, the greater will be his happiness, not as an accidental fact, but in virtue of the speculation, as speculation is honorable in itself. Hence happiness must be a kind of speculation." Speculation is even of a divine nature, for "the activity of God being preëminently blissful will be speculative, and if so, then the human activity which is most nearly related to it will be most capable of happiness."<sup>50</sup> In later times the Cynics took up this side of

<sup>48</sup> Frg. 1, 2 Diels.

<sup>49</sup> Aristot. *Metaph.* I 3, 984b, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Aristot. *Nic. Eth.* X 8 (tr. Welldon).

the Socratic teaching which recommended the neglect and depreciation of the body in favor of activity of the mind, and Socrates became their ideal sage. From them, the Stoics took their ideal of detachment from worldly affairs, and finally the Christians took from them and the Neo-Platonists (and to a certain extent from the various pagan religions with which they came in contact) the ideals which went to make up the Christian saint. Exactly how all this took place we shall see in the second part of our study, but it may be remarked at present that the whole work of the Hellenistic epoch consisted merely in an elaboration and exaggeration and popularization of ideas which have already been observed.

Before bringing our discussion to a close, however, one more thing must be added. Plato was not only a philosopher, but also a poet, and it may make it a little easier to understand his ideas better if we watch him approach them from this other poetic point of view as well. In the *Phaedrus* he gives a little myth which well illustrates his idea of higher activity at the expense of the body, and of the reward which awaits those who do such things; this is the story of the origin of grasshoppers.

"Grasshoppers are said to have been human beings in an age before the Muses. And when the Muses came and song appeared they were ravished with delight; and singing always, they never thought of eating and drinking, until at last they forgot and died. And now they live again in the grasshoppers; and this is the return which the Muses make to them—they hunger no more, neither thirst any more, but are always singing from the moment they are born, and never eating or drinking; and when they die, they go to the Muses in heaven."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Phaedr.* 259.

## PART II

# ASCETICISM IN THE GRÆCO-ROMAN WORLD

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## CHAPTER IV

### RELIGIOUS ASCETICISM

During the period immediately following the life of Plato, a great change came over Greece, which had the most far-reaching effect upon all the phases of Greek life and thought. Politically the old organization on the basis of city-states was wiped away by the Macedonian conquest, while the campaigns of Alexander in Asia widened the Greek world to an enormous extent. Economically the expansion was parallel, and Greece now became a part of the Hellenistic Empire. Intellectually the revolution was just as great: it has been seen how the activity of the sophists revolutionized the intellectual life of Athens, changing the population in less than a century from a group of superstitious farmers into one of the most enlightened communities which the world has ever seen. Though even Athens was not able to maintain this lofty position permanently, her history during the fifth century is but an exaggerated form of what was going on all over Greece in this and the following period. This intellectual emancipation and the great widening of the horizon which resulted from Alexander's conquests had so great an effect that a new period in the history of Greek thought must date from the end of the fourth century.

This social revolution was observable in all the phases of Greek life, but nowhere was it more evident than in religion.

After the criticism of the sophists, the old beliefs in the Olympian gods were no longer tenable for enlightened persons, the old religion was undermined, and men had to find a new one. This constant search for a new religion is the most important and most characteristic feature of the Hellenistic Age. Some people tried to revive old popular cults, and were to a certain extent successful. Eleusis continued to play an important rôle in the Greek religious life; the Orphics continued to attract a certain number of persons. The cults of gods who had formerly been rather insignificant, such as Asculapius or Hercules, were developed a great deal. Others established new cults, such as those of Fate or the Emperor. Still others sought to make philosophy a substitute for religion, and philosophical schools of a decidedly religious nature, such as Stoicism, became popular. But one of the most important of the religious developments of the centuries following Alexander was the introduction of new religions from the Orient. Even in the fourth century this process began, and during the next seven hundred years a constant stream of new religions poured into the western world from Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria, Persia, Babylonia and Palestine. The religious life of later Greece is therefore marked by the greatest confusion, by the struggles of sects, by the constant search for something new, for a religion which could adequately fill the needs of the new age: it was not until the advent of Christianity that such a religion was found.<sup>1</sup>

In the various foreign religions of the period, asceticism was prominent, but it must be stated at the outset that in the distinctly Greek cults and religions, there was little that was

<sup>1</sup> For a splendid general account of the political, economic and social developments of this period, and particularly for their repercussions upon intellectual, philosophical and religious development, see Wendland, *Die hellenistisch-römische Kultur* (3 ed., 1912). For the general religious development, see also Gruppe, *Griech. mythol.- u. rel.-geschichte*, II §3, pp. 1458ff. For detailed points, the modern literature is enormous; reference should be made here to the writings of Cumont, Reitzenstein, Wendland, Dieterich, Bousset, etc.

new. Orphism continued to teach the ascetic life, but it had already done so for many years, and it is quite impossible to say how much was added that was new; it is hardly probable that Orphism remained identically the same during the one thousand years of its history, but as has already been pointed out, there is absolutely no material which would enable one to trace its development exactly. It is probable, however, that the general point of view of the Orphics remained the same during their whole history, and that whatever changes did take place were in a greater or less emphasis upon certain details: as we are without materials for forming an accurate judgment, an *a priori* supposition may be hazarded, that as time went on, asceticism became more and more important in the Orphic mysteries, for, as will appear later, asceticism was very much more "in the air" during the later period than before, and the Orphics could hardly have failed to be affected by this *Zeitgeist*. The ascetic features of one of the most popular cults of this period, the Eleusian mysteries, have already been described; as in the Orphic mysteries, there was no fundamental change at this time, but it is probable that under the influence of contemporary thought the ascetic features received greater emphasis than before. In the new cults which were mentioned, such as the Emperor cult, there was ~~no place for asceticism~~, and the philosophical schools, while attempting to take the place of religion, were not religions, so their asceticism was not strictly religious asceticism; it was an ethical or philosophical asceticism, and will have to receive a separate treatment in the following chapters. It is thus seen that the strictly Greek side of the religious development of the Hellenistic times did not add much to the ascetic features of religion. This is probably due in part to the fact that persons of an ascetic turn of mind found their desires better filled, either by the philosophical schools, or by the oriental religions; attention must now be directed to these.

In regard to the oriental religions, a word of introduction

is necessary. It is not the purpose of the present study to give a complete account of the non-Christian antecedents of Christian asceticism, and much less to give a general history of asceticism; if this were its purpose, a great amount of space would have to be devoted to these religions. But the present paper is intended merely to give an account of the Greek antecedents of Christian asceticism. From this point of view, it might seem as though there were no occasion for mentioning oriental asceticism at all; this is just as wrong, however, as the other view, for, dating from the days of the Roman Empire at least, the devotees of these religions were to be found in all parts of the Roman world, and their influence upon Greeks and Romans was great. In the following chapters it will be seen how important this influence upon ethical teachers and philosophers was. The ethical teachers showed this influence by directly imitating Oriental ascetics, though they did so on purely ethical grounds—they did not accept any religion as a whole. Philosophers felt its effects chiefly through Gnosticism, a curious blend of Oriental theology and Platonic philosophy, which arose somewhat before the advent of the Christian era, and which had a powerful influence upon early Christians from the days of Paul on, but which also had a noticeable effect upon Greeks such as Plotinus. It is consequently necessary to have at least a general view of the nature of this oriental asceticism, if the later Greek development is to be understood. The account to which the remainder of this chapter will be devoted seeks to supply this general view, though it does not in any way pretend to be complete, and is based entirely upon the works of modern specialists.

Although the term "Oriental religions" covers a multitude of sects, coming from many lands, from Asia Minor to Egypt or Persia, and representing all stages of refinement, from the savage rites of Cybele to the highly spiritualized devotion to Isis, still there were certain things which they had in com-

mon. "Two new things in particular were brought by the Oriental priests: mysterious methods of purification, by which they claimed to wash away the impurities of the soul, and the assurance that a blessed immortality would be the reward of piety."<sup>2</sup> Such are the words in which Cumont sums up his researches on the subject. Now it has already been shown that both of these things had been offered for centuries by the Orphics, so one may ask whether the adjective "new" is correctly applied to them; but it is incontestable that the Oriental religions did present these ideas to many persons for the first time—Orphism had always been confined to a relatively small number of persons—and that they did actually present just these things. Moreover, they agreed, to a considerable extent, in the methods by which they sought to attain this purity: they "pretended to restore lost purity to the soul either through the performance of ritual ceremonies or through mortifications and penance. They had a series of ablutions and lustrations supposed to restore original innocence to the mystic. He had to wash himself in the sacred water according to certain prescribed forms. . . . The votary, again, might drink or besprinkle himself with the blood of a slaughtered victim or of the priests themselves, in which case the prevailing idea was that the liquid circulating in the veins was a vivifying principle capable of imparting a new existence. These and similar rites were supposed to regenerate the initiated person and to restore him to an immaculate and incorruptible life."<sup>3</sup> But this purgation of the soul was not effected solely through such liturgic acts; at times, self-denial and suffering, real asceticism, was required. "Abstinence, which prevented the introduction of deadly elements into the system, and chastity, which preserved men from pollution and debility, became means of getting rid of the domination of evil powers and of regaining heavenly

<sup>2</sup> Cumont, *Oriental Religions in the Roman Empire* (1907), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39f.

favor. Macerations, laborious pilgrimages, public confessions, sometimes flagellations and mutilations, in fact, all forms of penance and mortifications uplifted the fallen man and brought him nearer the gods. . . . This shows the introduction into Europe of Oriental asceticism."<sup>4</sup> Asceticism was therefore one of the prominent features of these new religions, and undoubtedly contributed not a little to their spread, while on the other hand, their spread contributed not a little to the development of ascetic ideals in the Roman world; the two advanced simultaneously as things went from bad to worse in the Roman Empire. "We note the spread of that feeling of exhaustion and debility which follows the aberrations of passion, and the same weakness that led to crime impelled men to seek absolution in the formal practices of asceticism."<sup>5</sup> But without dwelling further upon a discussion of the causes of this ascetic movement, let us attempt to describe more carefully the asceticism taught by specific religions.

*Cybele* As these Oriental religions were all independent of one another, there is no logical order for studying them, and a geographical order will be as good as any. Then the first cult to be studied will be that of Cybele. This cult has been traced back to the Cretans, fifteen centuries before our era, whence it passed, at an early date, to Asia Minor, where it found its real home in the Anatolian highlands of Phrygia. The Greek goddess Rhea was probably descended from the same Minoan ancestor, but by the end of the fifth century, Cybele began to appear in Greece herself, under the name of Mother of the Gods.<sup>6</sup> The cult of the goddess was formally introduced into Rome in the year 204 B.C. From that time on, this religion was among the most popular in the city, until the second and third centuries A.D., when it

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Graillot, *Le Culte de Cybèle, Mère des Dieux* (1912), pp. 1-24.



reached its greatest importance, and was even accepted by emperors.<sup>7</sup> The principal rite of the religion was the taurobolium, or sacrifice of a bull, for the safety of a beneficiary; sometimes it was for the safety of the Emperor, the Empire or a city, and sometimes for that of an individual person.<sup>8</sup> The ascetic features of the cult are illustrated in the institution of sacred eunuchs, or Galli, who were in the service of the goddess. The barbarous rite of emasculation here employed was probably of Semitic origin and always remained abhorrent to the greater part of the Occidentals, but the empire could not prevent its spread. "The Galli were mystics who had received the major initiation. They had reached the highest step of the mystic ladder. Emasculation is here the supreme consecration, a veritable sacrament. . . . Properly speaking, it is a votive offering, resting upon the original notion of substitution and ransom. At the beginning, they sacrificed some of the most beautiful adolescents of the tribe. Later, a partial sacrifice, the ablation and oblation of the virile organs, might take the place of the complete sacrifice of life."<sup>9</sup> The men who had offered this sacrifice held a privileged place in the religion: they wore special insignia, they performed divination, cured cattle, prophesied and became magicians; sometimes they developed orgiastic cults of their own, marked by wild dances terminating in delirium, by flagellation and maceration, the sacrifice of their own blood, and by mutilations.<sup>10</sup> Their whole life was separated from that of profane persons. "Their religious life is incompatible with lay existence. For them, the service of their lady is exclusive; it keeps them about the temples and holy images."<sup>11</sup> They lived upon charity. They were subjected to a common rule which imposed mendicancy upon

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 224.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. iv.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 301ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

them, which led Tertullian to speak of it as a "Religion of beggars." This demanding alms was one of their forms of asceticism.<sup>12</sup> The Galli resembled a mendicant and begging order.<sup>13</sup> By this mode of life, they won the admiration of multitudes. "Their ardent faith, their ascetic life, their austere disciplines were an effective and contagious discipline. Many a troubled soul was borne towards these interpreters of a divine word, who appeared superior to other men because they were no longer men, who heard confessions and directed consciences, forgave sins, and gave consolations and sublime hopes."<sup>14</sup> Others did not attain the lofty place held by these Galli, but led an ascetic life nevertheless. Some who had merely undergone a simple initiation organized themselves into communities called the "Religious of the Great Mother," and led a life of greater strictness than that of other people, supported wandering Galli, let their hair grow long, wore special costumes; but they were not pagan monks in the full sense of the term, for they did not cut themselves off from the world altogether—they married and became fathers of families.<sup>15</sup>

attis

The companion of Cybele was Attis. Though apparently of an independent origin, he was, in historical times, always associated with her as her lover. In fact, the self-mutilation which the Galli performed was explained as being in imitation of Attis's emasculating himself during frenzy. But there were certain features of the Phrygian religion which were an Attis cult, and which merit special attention as they contained exceptional ascetic elements. According to the myth, Attis died as a result of his self-mutilation, and his death was bitterly mourned by Cybele. In memory of this event, the worshippers mourned also, every spring. During three days they spent their time in lamenting the death of the

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

god. But in the night of the last day, their sorrow was turned to joy, for the priest announced that Attis had risen. This was hailed as a promise that they too would ultimately issue triumphant from the corruption of the grave.<sup>16</sup> During the days of mourning, however, the worshippers had given themselves over to a stringent asceticism—perhaps in preparation for the coming sacrament as much as in a sign of sorrow—which was a performance much like the day of Fasting in the Greek Thesmophoria. They abstained from sexual intercourse and from certain forbidden foods, particularly bread.<sup>17</sup>

This Easter rejoicing preceded by three days of ascetic mourning is also found in the cult of Adonis, in Syria. In fact, the resemblance of the two cults is so great that some have inferred a common origin. According to the myth, Adonis was slain by a boar, while hunting, and was bitterly mourned for by Aphrodite (*i. e.*, Astarte; Adonis is a Greek form of Adon, "lord," his Syrian name being Tammuz.) This mourning was imitated each spring by his worshippers, particularly at Byblos, but also elsewhere (including Jerusalem, Ezek. 8, 14), and on the third day, just as in the Attis cult, they rejoiced for the risen Adonis.<sup>18</sup> Here again, therefore, we find the doctrine that sorrow expressed merely by weeping, or else accompanied by ascetic acts, is an effective purification, and a fitting preparation for sacred things. The Syrians also had a sacred fish, which could not be eaten; we read of a man who had offended the goddess by eating this fish: "dressed in sordid rags, he covered himself with a sack and sat in the public highway humbly to proclaim his misdeed in order to obtain forgiveness."<sup>19</sup> We also read that the Syrian goddess, too, had her Galli.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, I, p. 272.

<sup>17</sup> Hepding, *Attis, seine Mythen und sein Kult* (1904), pp. 155, 182.

<sup>18</sup> Frazer, *Op. cit.*, I, ch. i and ix.

<sup>19</sup> Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222, n. 31.

Adonis

*Mithra*

Farther to the east was Persia, the home of the religion of Mithra. As far back as the religion of this people has been traced, it has been found that they worshipped a divinity of light, named Mithra, who soon began to receive special attention. Regarded as a god of light or fire, sometimes identified with the sun, and also regarded as a war god and the giver of victory, Mithra received great attention during the period of the Persian Empire, and had a large place in the official cult. Finally, during the period of moral and religious fermentation provoked by the Macedonian conquest, Mithraism received its final form—the form under which it subsequently spread over the Roman Empire.<sup>21</sup> The religion of Mithra was not well received in Greece, but in Rome it was for a long time one of the principal religions. It was apparently introduced into Italy during the first century B.C., but dating from the end of the first century A.D. began its real prominence. It was always a religion particularly popular with the army, and the chief centers of its cult were the camps guarding the frontiers of the empire. The religion was dualistic in its character, dividing all things into two classes, the good ones being under the charge of the superior gods of light, and the bad ones given over to the powers of darkness. A mighty conflict between good and evil was supposed to be engaged in upon earth, and this universal conflict gave the key to the moral system taught by the religion. "Life is a proving, and to leave it victoriously, one had to observe the law which the god himself had delivered to the ancient Magi."<sup>22</sup> Incertitude as to the exact nature of this law is extreme, but it appears that "perfect purity remained for them the end towards which the existence of the faithful should tend. Their ritual included repeated lustrations and ablutions, which were believed to wash away the stains of the

<sup>21</sup> Cumont, *Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (1896ff.), I, pp. 223ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 307.

soul. This purification conformed to Mazdean traditions, as well as being in harmony with the general tendencies of the epoch. Ceding to these tendencies, the Mithraists even carried their principles to excesses, so that their ideal of perfection inclined towards asceticism. They praised abstinence from certain foods and absolute continence."<sup>23</sup> The cult had a clergy upon whom ascetic rules were imposed. Tertullian says that the supreme pontiff might marry only once, and that, like the Christians, the worshippers of this god had their "virgins" and "continents."<sup>24</sup> "The existence of this sort of Mithraic monasticism is the more remarkable," says Cumont, "because this value attached to celibacy is contrary to the spirit of Zoroastrianism."<sup>25</sup> It serves to illustrate, however, how great the tendencies in this direction were.

The other great religion which spread through the Roman Empire was the Egyptian cult of Isis. This goddess was the chief divinity of Egypt in the last epoch of its religious development. As was pointed out above,<sup>26</sup> some scholars are of the opinion that the cult of Isis exercised considerable influence upon the Greek religion in the earliest stages of its development; it is certain that by the time of Herodotus, the Greeks themselves believed that they saw affinities between the two religions. But later the Egyptian cult itself was introduced: it had long been known in the Aegean archipelago, but by 350 B.C. an altar had been erected to Isis at Piræus; later the cult appeared in other parts of Greece, and in the first century B.C., it was introduced into Rome; during more than five centuries it was tended in the Latin world.<sup>27</sup> In the worship of Isis, asceticism always had a

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Supra*, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Roscher, *Lex. d. griech. u. röm. myth.*, art. "Isis"; Cumont, *Or. Rel.*, pp. 78-85.

prominent place. The myth related that at one time her son Osiris was killed, and his body cut up and thrown into the Nile; for a long time she sought him, sorrowing, until at last she found him and brought him to life again. In memory of this event, her worshippers lamented also for a while over the slain Osiris, but as in the other religions, their sorrow was followed by rejoicing upon the resurrection of the god.<sup>28</sup> The period of mourning was marked by fasts and other ascetic rites. It has sometimes been urged that a special asceticism was demanded of the priests of Isis. A fragment of the Stoic Chaeremon has preserved a description of these priests, with their ascetic life, their slow march, their down-cast eyes, etc.;<sup>29</sup> but it has recently been strongly urged that this description is a great exaggeration. The most recent writer on the subject maintains that there was no asceticism among the Egyptian priests. But whether Chaeremon exaggerated or not, it is certain that Otto<sup>30</sup> is wrong when he denies that there were any ascetics at all. It is certain that at least in the second century before our era, there were individuals who had given themselves over to an ascetic life in honor of Isis or Serapis. In the papyri coming from the great Serapeum at Memphis there is frequent mention of individuals called *κἀτοχοι*, who were recluses in the temple and devoted to the service of the goddess. It is true that Preuschen and others maintain that this word means "possessed," and signifies that these individuals were "possessed" by the goddess or inspired,<sup>31</sup> but the best modern scholars agree that it really means "bound" and signifies that they were recluses, prisoners of the goddess.<sup>32</sup> Over sixty years

<sup>28</sup> Frazer, *Op. cit.*, II, ch. i, and pp. 49-51, 84-86.

<sup>29</sup> *Apud* Porphy. *de Abst.* IV 6.

<sup>30</sup> Otto, *Priester und Tempel im hellenistischen Ägypten* (1905), II, p. 167.

<sup>31</sup> Preuschen, *Mönchtum und Serapiskult* (1899).

<sup>32</sup> Bouché-Leclercq, in *Mélanges Perrot*, p. 17ff.; Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Mysterienreligionen*, p. 74.

ago Brunet de Presle, in a paper read before the French Institute, suggested a connection between these recluses and the early monks;<sup>33</sup> several years later, Weingarten seriously attempted to explain the whole rise of Christian monasticism from them, alleging that Pachomius, the legislator of Christian monasticism, had been such a recluse in his youth;<sup>34</sup> this is obviously too simple a theory, and is not held by any serious scholars today, but the very posing of the question directed considerable attention to these men, and their ascetic character has been made very evident. "We may also consider as established that the *κἀτοχοι* of Serapis and Isis are novices who serve for years or even a life time in the temple in the hope of consecration," and that there was a theory that "this neglect of the body was especially pleasing to God, and a hope of being considered worthy of extraordinary dreams and visions while in such a state."<sup>35</sup> As time went on, asceticism became ever more common in Egypt: in the second and third centuries, the land was filled with anchorites and wandering ascetics, who not only made it a point to abstain from flesh, wine and sexual intercourse, but who also inflicted upon themselves all sorts of severe mortifications.<sup>36</sup> Egypt became preeminently the land of extravagant ascetics, so that the eccentric Christians had but little to add to what these Egyptians had already done.

As was said at the outset, all of this had the greatest influence upon later Christian development, but for the Greeks, its effect was felt chiefly through the intermediacy of that curious philosophy known as Gnosticism, which grew up out of a combination of the theological tenets of these various

<sup>33</sup> *Mémoire sur le Sérapéum de Memphis*, in *Mémoires Présentés par diverses savants à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* II (1852).

<sup>34</sup> *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums in nachconstantinischen Zeitalter* (1877).

<sup>35</sup> Reitzenstein, *Mysterienrel.*, pp. 89ff.

<sup>36</sup> Reitzenstein, *Wundererzählungen*, pp. 65ff., 142ff., etc.

sects with Platonic philosophy. A few words must therefore be devoted to a description of some of the features of this system.

The term Gnosticism is applied to a somewhat heterogeneous group of systems of belief which were prevalent during the first three centuries of our era, and which concerned themselves with a *γνῶσις*, or higher knowledge, which amounted to a revelation for the direction of life. Though it was the result of the general syncretism of the period, the sources of the different Gnostic systems varied: thus some Gnostics showed closer affinities with Egyptian, others with Babylonian, and others with Persian thought, but all included within their systems elements coming from all of these sources, as well as from Greek philosophy.<sup>37</sup> This type of thought had the greatest influence upon the speculations of the early Christians: in the second century there was an extremely close connection between the two, but these relations go back to the apostle Paul himself, who was profoundly influenced by Gnostic speculation.<sup>38</sup> But it is clear that Gnosticism was independent of Christianity and even preceded it.<sup>39</sup>

The central ideas common to all the systems of Gnostic speculation were those of a radical dualism in the world, and of the ascent of the soul to the higher element. This dualism contained both the Persian antithesis of good and bad, of light and darkness, and the Platonic antithesis of soul and body. Into the details of the myths by which the origin of this dualism was explained, it is not necessary to go: it will be sufficient to say that they were a most curious and

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Scott, in *Encyc. Rel. and Ethics*, art. "Gnosticism," p. 234.

<sup>38</sup> See particularly, Reitzenstein, *Mysterienrel.*; p. 56: "Die religionsgeschichtliche Betrachtung darf ihn stellen nicht als den ersten, aber als den grössten Gnostiker." P. 59: "Die hellenistische religiöse Literatur muss er gelesen haben; ihre Sprache redet er, ihre Gedanken hat er sich hineinversetzt."

<sup>39</sup> Friedländer, *Der vorchristl. jüd. Gnosticismus* (1898).



confused medley of myths from all sorts of sources and representing all stages of refinement. In the universe which this dualism thus divided into hostile camps, man held an intermediate position: he was evil, he was material, but he also had a soul, though a fallen one, and by this he was attached to the superior world.<sup>40</sup> Now the central idea of Gnosticism was redemption: the Gnosis was offered to the elect as a means whereby the soul might free itself from the body and its bondage. As all of the evil and misery of the world were blamed upon the mixture of the two antagonistic principles, redemption from them consisted in deliverance from the intrinsically evil material world. It is obvious that such a theory could only lead to a stringent asceticism as the basis of ethical teaching, and as a matter of fact, a study of the great Gnostics shows that they did teach just such an asceticism.

The great Gnostics, Basilides, Valentinus and Marcion, were Christians as well, but this did not prevent their being perfectly good Gnostics, and it is certain that their asceticism was not of Christian origin, for in their day Christianity had developed very little asceticism; it was rather they who first introduced it into Christianity on a large scale. A study of their asceticism will therefore show the typically Gnostic theories on the subject.

For Basilides, marriage was at best a concession to men, and he strongly advised abstention from it; though he regarded the sexual appetite as natural, he said that it was by no means imperative, and held that it was better not to gratify it.<sup>41</sup> He also taught the purifying virtues of suffering—an idea which is at the basis of all highly developed asceticism, and which has already been met with. "Tribulations and sufferings expiate, purify and correct," he taught. "They

<sup>40</sup> For Gnostic dualism, see Bousset, *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* (1907), pp. 91ff.

<sup>41</sup> de Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme* (1913), p. 27; cf. Bousset, p. 95.

constitute the punishment which saves, the *κολαστήριον*, and are consequently a good thing. Basilides says so expressly. He declares that they are the result of the goodness of 'him who leads all things.' The martyr is a privileged person. The expiation which he undergoes is more glorious than that which falls to ordinary believers."<sup>42</sup> Like him, his son Isidore also taught a most rigorous asceticism. For both, asceticism was a way of redemption, and it was to it that they gave their entire attention.<sup>43</sup>

Valentinus was preoccupied with much the same question and gave a similar answer. His fundamental theories of the distinction of soul and body, and that the body is the source of all evil and the enemy to be routed, naturally led to asceticism; in fact, he made this an essential part of what amounts to a veritable doctrine of sin and redemption. "With these views, Valentinus could not fail to become an ascetic in morals. In the final analysis, redemption, for him, consisted in the elimination of the corporal element, in the mortification of the flesh, in a sort of inward death. To realize this ideal was the privilege of spiritual men."<sup>44</sup>

Marcion, too, was an ascetic, and even went so far in this regard that some accused him of being a Cynic. He condemned the flesh and forbade marriage. If married, his disciples had to renounce all sexual relations. "Tertullian constantly finds fault with him on this account. 'Caro in nuptio tollitur,' he said. 'Why does he impose chastity upon this infirm and unworthy flesh, whether this is to be considered a burden or a glory?'"<sup>45</sup> Marcion even made continence a condition of baptism. "Marcion does not baptise flesh unless it is virgin or widow or celibate, or unless it has bought baptism by a divorce. This institution is born of the condemnation of marriage."<sup>46</sup> He even carried his asceticism into his

<sup>42</sup> de Faye, p. 30; references to fr. in Clem. Al. *Strom.* IV 12, 83.

<sup>43</sup> de Faye, pp. 27, 34.

<sup>44</sup> de Faye, p. 42; Clem. Al. *Strom.* IV 13, 89.

<sup>45</sup> de Faye, p. 147; Tertullian, *adv. Marc.* I 28.

<sup>46</sup> Ter. *adv. Marc.* I 29.

theory of the world, and became a complete pessimist. "It may be asked whether it was his doctrine of God which, as a logical consequence, made Marcion an ascetic, or whether it was his asceticism, which was older than his theological ideas, which found a plausible excuse in these. It seems probable that Marcion, like all the fervent souls of his time, philosophers as well as Christians, early felt strong ascetic tendencies. When he had once established his great principle of the opposition between the supreme God and the creator, he saw in it the most solid foundation for virtue as he understood it. His doctrine of God strengthened his asceticism, and gave it a more precise form."<sup>47</sup>

Such were the ascetic tendencies of the oriental religions which entered the Roman Empire during the first centuries of our era. In the following chapters it will be shown what effect these had upon subsequent Greek speculation.

<sup>47</sup> de Faye, pp. 147-8; Bousset, p. 111.

## CHAPTER V

### ETHICAL ASCETICISM

The new elements of the Greek religion which appeared during the centuries following Alexander were not, therefore, of indigenous origin, but were importations from the Orient. As much may be said for the ascetic tendencies of the age which were strictly religious: they were of eastern origin and were introduced into the Occident along with the religions of which they formed a part. If it were not for the fact that these oriental religions and this oriental asceticism affected Greek speculation on the subject to a remarkable extent, there would be no occasion for mentioning the religious asceticism of the period at all here. But it is undeniable that such an influence was actually exercised, so a brief account of the oriental asceticism and its theory was essential to an understanding of the later Greek asceticism.

But though the Greek religion, properly so called, did not develop greatly during the period of the Hellenistic and Roman Empires, the Greek mind had not lost its originality nor had it ceased to speculate. The only difference was that this speculation began to flow in other channels. As has been pointed out above, the old official religions had become untenable for a large part of the people, and new means had therefore to be found for satisfying their religious needs. One means that was tried, the introduction of new cults, has been described; another equally important one was found in what were known as philosophical schools.

A movement towards the establishment of such schools arose among the immediate disciples of Socrates, who divided themselves up into groups, Cyrenaics, Megareans, Cynics, etc. As time went on, these sects and their successors received

an ever-increasing attention, until in the early years of the Roman Empire, when they reached their fullest development, the majority of the upper class people had attached themselves to one school or another. These schools, therefore, filled a distinctly religious need, and their teaching took an increasingly religious aspect; they cannot be called religions, however, for they lacked one thing that is essential to every religion, namely, a cult. But if these schools were not religions, neither was their teaching philosophy in the strictest sense of the term. Though it is unquestionably true that many of these schools, and particularly the Stoics, did produce philosophers of note, still the name philosopher cannot be applied to every one who was a member of one of these schools. Philosophy, as now understood, is a discipline to which but few have either the leisure or the ability to devote themselves, and which includes the formulation of a reasoned view of life and the universe. These schools, and especially the more popular ones, did not do this: they appealed to a wider class of people than could interest themselves in such problems, and what they gave these people was a set of maxims for the conduct of life. Some may have developed upon these maxims and thus formulated a real philosophy (as was the case with Seneca, for example, whose writings will be examined in the next chapter), but the vast majority of the adherents to the schools did not: they contented themselves with regulating their lives according to the precepts of their school, so the schools may be called ethical schools and their thought ethical thought; their asceticism was ethical asceticism.

These ethical schools were numerous, each catering to a different sort of people, and each supplying a different sort of ethical system. The one which best illustrates the ascetic tendencies of the day is that of the Cynics.

Cynicism claimed to go back to the Socratic teaching; it claimed as its founder Antisthenes, who is described in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and *Symposium*. But its real founder

was Diogenes of Sinope, who flourished in the middle of the fourth century. After him came Crates and various lesser disciples, but after about the middle of the third century we lose track of the school. But in the first century B.C. it re-emerged, and from then until the time of St. Augustine it remained one of the most prominent of the ethical schools.

Cynicism has been spoken of as "the philosophy of the Greek proletariat."<sup>1</sup> Though there were brilliant exceptions, such as Hipparchia, the majority of the followers of this school were of plebeian origin. They made it their mission in life to carry on an uncompromising warfare against all the institutions of their day, political, religious and other, and the method they chose for doing this was to ridicule and abuse. The *Diatribē*, an abusive, scurrilous and sometimes vulgar, but always witty harangue, became their favorite form of discourse: they so popularized it that it became the standard form for all agitators with a message, and traces of it are clearly observable in the epistles of St. Paul and St. James.<sup>2</sup> They foreswore all the comforts of civilization themselves, and wandered about from place to place, delivering their diatribes, and living as best they could; they have frequently been compared to the begging friars of later ages.<sup>3</sup>

The cardinal point in the Cynics' teaching was the supreme value of virtue, and the utter insignificance of everything else: if other things were not positively bad, they were at least indifferent and unworthy of a man's efforts. Wisdom itself they classified among indifferent things. They allowed of no distinctions between men except on the basis of virtue alone: rich and poor, freeman and slave, wise and foolish, Greek and barbarian were all alike to them, except in so far as one excelled another in virtue. Moreover, they saw in civilization the chief enemy of virtue. According to their

<sup>1</sup> Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers*, II, p. 148 (Eng. tr.).

<sup>2</sup> Wendland, *Philo und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (1895); *Die urchristliche Literaturformen* (1912); R. Bultman, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (1910).

<sup>3</sup> Bernays, *Lucian und die Kyniker* (1879), p. 99.

doctrine, the philosopher should show himself absolutely independent of civilization and society, and even of other persons, and devote himself entirely to the pursuit of virtue. Hence came the eccentricities and bizzareries for which the founders of the school are famous: we all know of the numerous legends of which Diogenes is the hero, of his life in a barrel, of his scanty clothes, his attempts to do without fire by eating his meat raw, of his disregard for social conventions and usages which resulted in the completest shamelessness; these were all means by which he sought to express his entire self-sufficiency and to lead a life in harmony with nature.<sup>4</sup> But exactly what they meant by virtue, beyond this independence and life of nature, is by no means clear: it is a fact that their teaching was largely of a negative character.

Because of their emphasis upon a renunciation of the goods of civilization, the Cynics found some of the phases of the Socratic teaching particularly sympathetic: in a former chapter extracts were quoted illustrating Socrates's contempt for the goods of this world—though as modified by Platonic idealism. The Cynics seized upon these same things, but gave them a very different interpretation, for they were radical empiricists.<sup>5</sup> Starting from these premises, they developed a rule of life which from the first bore great resemblance to that of ascetics, and which later had a very great influence upon the development of asceticism. They taught that life was a constant struggle against evils and Hercules became

<sup>4</sup> These stories came mostly from Diogenes Laertius, Bk. VI, and Clement of Alexandria; they can be taken for what they are worth. Cf. Schwartz, *Charakterköpfe aus der antiken Literatur*, Zweite Reihe, I, "Diogenes der Hund und Krates der Kyniker."

<sup>5</sup> The contempt in which Plato and the Cynics mutually held each other was due no doubt in part to the differences in their social status, and in part to their radical philosophical differences. Thus Simplicius (Categ. Schol. in Arist. 66b45) tells how Antisthenes said to Plato, "I can see a horse, but not the idea of a horse." Plato replied, "True, for you have the eye with which one sees a horse, but you are deficient in the eye with which one sees the idea of a horse."

their patron god. They compared life to the struggles of an athlete (tradition says that one of the early Cynics was a boxer before he was won for philosophy) and it was from them that came the many similes to the prize-ring, of which moralists in the Roman Empire, such as Seneca or St. Paul, were so fond.

As a matter of fact, this is about all that the asceticism of the earlier Cynicism amounted to: every philosopher should be free from dependence upon anything, so should denounce and reject all things; he should do all in his power to harden himself against them, and to the practices employed to this end, they gave the name *ἀσκησις*. It has already been seen that certain of the sophists used this term to designate the mode of life by which one should live; the Cynics did the same, only their mode of life was a much more rigorous one, and demanded acts which had never been demanded before. As has been seen, the Cynics did this as a reaction against the reigning social order, and not because they had another which they wished to introduce: their ideal of *ἀρετή* consisted largely in foreswearing all civilization, which they considered the cause of all vice, and by returning to the happy state of nature. They taught that if a man should train himself by asceticism, he would be freed from the temptations of the world and its lusts. It was in this that the Cynics differed from Plato: Plato saw the chief enemy of the philosophic life in the body, but the Cynics saw it in civilization; Plato urged that one chastise the body, but the Cynics, with their teaching that *naturalia non sunt turpia*, were willing to indulge such passions as they considered natural (as the sexual passion), frequently in a most shameless way; Plato sought things which were ideal and social, the Cynics sought things which were empirical and individual. Thus Diogenes gave himself no pains to chastise his sinful body, but fortified it against desire. When some one asked him what a philosopher should eat, he replied, "Whatever he can get, just like



anybody else." The Cynic life consisted in seeking *εὐδαιμονία*, and the way it did this was by avoiding the lusts and desires engendered by the civilization against which it was a revolt.

Such was the asceticism of the early Cynics. It was clearly the product of the time which produced it—the decadent Greece of the fourth century. From the third to the first century before Christ, following upon the conquests of Alexander, things picked up a little in Greece, and the Cynics became less prominent. But after the Roman conquest, a decline again began and the school once more came into prominence. A Neo-Cynicism then arose which continued the traditional sturdy rebelliousness of the early school; once more all the institutions of society were subjected to the attacks of popular wandering beggars who professed allegiance to the doctrines of Diogenes.

The historians of the Imperial period frequently speak of Cynic preachers, but after all, one of our best sources for these Cynics is Lucian, who seems to have taken a great interest in them, even though his accounts are far from sympathetic. In many of his writings, such as *On the Death of Peregrinus*, *Zeus Cross-Examined*, *Cynicus*, or *The Sale of Creeds*, he gives descriptions of Cynics and their mode of life which are most enlightening.

Thus as a description of the typical Cynic, one may quote the words, "Who are you, anyway? You have a beard and long hair, but no shirt, and your skin shows; you go barefoot, choosing a wandering and inhuman life like the beasts; unlike others, you make your body the object of your austerities, and you constantly go about from place to place, sleeping only on the hard ground, so that that philosopher's cloak is disgustingly dirty, though it never was fine or soft or bright colored."<sup>6</sup> Dressed in such a uniform and leading such a life, the Cynics travelled over the whole empire, giving frequent examples of their outspokenness, not even hesitating to de-

<sup>6</sup> Luc. *Cyn.* 1.

nounce the Emperor to his face in the theater,<sup>7</sup> and carrying on a warfare against the popular religions which was scarcely less bitter than that waged by the Christians.<sup>8</sup>

The positive side of their creed, in so far as there was any, consisted in a preaching of brotherhood (*φιλανθρωπία*) and a promise of liberty to those who followed their mode of life. But in the main, now as in the earlier period, the chief item in their creed was the utter worthlessness of all the mundane things upon which men ordinarily set their hearts. The life and in particular the death of a celebrated Cynic of the second century, Peregrinus, make this clear.

In his essay *On the Death of Peregrinus*, Lucian tells the story of this man. He was born in Armenia, but while still a young man he commenced to follow the wandering life of a Cynic. Lucian says that for a while he was associated with the Christians in Palestine, who made much of him; he was arrested but presently dismissed. He returned to Armenia; "his hair (even in these early days) is long, his cloak is shabby; at his side is flung the philosopher's wallet, his hand grasps the philosopher's staff." He distributed all the wealth which had been left him by his father; when the people heard the news, they said, "Here is true philosophy; the spirit of true philosophy is here."<sup>9</sup> Presently, after severing his connection with the Christians, he made a trip of Egypt. "Here he went through the most interesting course of discipline: he shaved half of his head bare, anointed his face with mud, grossly exposed himself before a large number of spectators as a practical illustration of 'Stoic indifference,' received castigation with a birch rod, administered the same, and mystified the public with a number of still more extravagant follies."<sup>10</sup> Then he went to Rome, where he commenced to

<sup>7</sup> This is said to have happened to Titus, Sueton. *Tit.* 7; other examples are given by Luc. *de Morte Per.* 17, 18; Dion Cass. 66, 5, 13. Cf. Bernays, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Luc. *Zeus Conf.*; *Vit. Auct.* 8. Bernays, p. 32ff.

<sup>9</sup> Luc. *de Morte Per.* 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

abuse everybody, and particularly the Emperor, until he was expelled from the city; "he was in every one's mouth as the philosopher who was banished for being too outspoken, and saying what he thought. He took place with Musonius, Dion and Epictetus."<sup>11</sup> Finally he went to Greece, and there conceived the idea of closing his life by publicly cremating himself at the Olympic games. He appeared at an important moment during the games, to announce his resolution and explain it: Lucian tells us how he talked about "the life he had lived, the risks he had run, the trials he had undergone in the cause of philosophy. . . . Upon a golden life he desired to set a golden crown. He had lived like Heracles: like Heracles he must die, and mingle with the upper air. 'It is my aim,' he continued, 'to benefit mankind; to teach them how contemptible a thing is death.'<sup>12</sup> A pyre was prepared, and it was announced that the cremation would take place at midnight. "Then Proteus (*i.e.*, Peregrinus) threw aside his scrip and cloak and club—his club of Heracles—and stood before them in scrupulously unclean linen. He demanded frankincense to throw upon the fire; being supplied, he first threw it on, then, turning to the south, he exclaimed: 'Gods of my mother, gods of my father, receive me with favor.' With these words he leaped into the fire."<sup>13</sup> Naturally this act aroused the greatest interest and many came to regard Peregrinus as superhuman; legends grew up about him, statues were erected to him.<sup>14</sup>

Lucian's entire treatment of the story of Peregrinus is most severe. He ascribed all of his activity to the basest motives, particularly love of notoriety, and pictured him as a most blatant impostor. But it is far from certain that this is a just estimation of him. The great Cynic made a very different impression upon Aulus Gellius, who had frequently

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 32, 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 40, 41.

visited him during his student days at Athens, and who found him a serious and high-minded man.<sup>15</sup> It is an undeniable fact that Cynicism did appeal to persons in the lower classes of society, and undoubtedly it attracted many unscrupulous impostors, but it is equally certain that many Cynics had lofty characters, and it is quite possible that in his self-immolation Peregrinus sincerely wished to give men a practical lesson teaching contempt of death.<sup>16</sup>

Another Cynic, with much the same gospel, but a very different method of teaching it, was the gentle sage Demonax. His character was such that he even won the admiration of that universal scoffer Lucian, who had "long consorted with him," and who wrote his biography "to keep his memory green, and provide the most earnest of those who aspire to philosophy with a contemporary pattern."<sup>17</sup> A Cyprian by birth, he came of an influential family, but "his views soared above such things as wealth; he claimed nothing less than the highest, and devoted himself to philosophy."<sup>18</sup> His teachers, Epictetus, Demetrius and others, taught him to lay the greatest stress upon self-sufficiency, freedom from fear and hope, and a good disposition. "He took independence and candor for his guiding principles, lived himself an upright, wholesome, irreproachable life, and exhibited to all who saw or heard him the model of his own disposition and philosophic sincerity. . . . He was consistent enough, when he found that he could no longer suffice to himself, to depart voluntarily from life, leaving a great reputation behind him among the nobility of Greece."<sup>19</sup> Lucian has preserved for us many

<sup>15</sup> Aul. Gell. xii, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, pp. 356ff.; M. Croiset, *Un ascète païen au siècle des Antonins. Peregrinus Protée*, in the *Mémoires . . . de l'Académie . . . de Montpellier*, 1880, vol. vi, pp. 455-491. Zeller, *Alexander und Peregrinus*, in *Deutsche Rundschau*, Sept., 1876.

<sup>17</sup> Luc. *Demon.* 1, 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 3, 4.

of his biting criticisms of men of his day, and also his teaching of the insignificant value of worldly goods. "To all who repined at poverty, resented exile, or complained of old age or bad health, he administered laughing consolation, and bade them not forget how soon their troubles would be over, the distinction between good and bad be obsolete, and long freedom succeed to short-lived distress."<sup>20</sup> He lived to be nearly a hundred years old, free from disease and pain, burdening no man, asking no man's favors, serving his friends, and having no enemies. Not Athens only, but all Greece was so in love with him that as he passed, great men would give him place and there would be a general hush. Baker wives would contend for the honor of supplying him, while children used to call him father and make him presents of fruit.<sup>21</sup> When he died, the Athenians gave him a public funeral, his body was borne to the grave by philosophers, and his memory held sacred.<sup>22</sup>

The best account of the Cynics, however, and the most sympathetic, is the one given by Epictetus,<sup>23</sup> who was himself a Cynic or nearly one. According to him, the true Cynic "must know that he is sent a messenger from Zeus to men about good and bad things, to show them that they have wandered and are seeking the substance of good and evil where it is not, but where it is they never think. . . . In fact the Cynic is a spy of the things which are good for men and which are evil, and it is his duty to examine carefully and to come and report truly, and not to be struck with terror so as to point out as enemies things which are not enemies, nor in any other way to be perturbed by appearances nor confounded."<sup>24</sup> "Man, the Cynic is the father of all men; the men are his sons, the women are his daughters: he so care-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>23</sup> *Diss.* iii 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* § 23-25 (Schenkl).

fully visits all, so well does he care for all. Do you think that it is from idle impatience that he rebukes those whom he meets? He does it as a father, as a brother, and as the minister of the father of all, the minister of Zeus."<sup>25</sup> Such is the lofty calling of the true Cynic, and one must constantly labor to make himself worthy of it.

In the course of his essay, Epictetus gives several examples of Cynic diatribes, which well illustrate the teachings of his school. Thus he teaches that power and happiness are not to be found in external things. "You seek for prosperity and happiness where they are not," the ideal Cynic teacher is made to declaim, "and if another shows you where they are, you do not believe him. Why do you seek it without? In the body? It is not there. If you doubt, look at Myro, look at Ophellius. In possessions? It is not there. But if you do not believe me, look at Croesus: look at those who are now rich, with what lamentations their life is filled. In power? It is not there. If it were, those would be happy who have been twice or thrice consuls, but they are not."<sup>26</sup> Again, he holds himself up as a model of how one should act to be happy, and incidentally gives an excellent picture of a Cynic:

"And how is it possible that a man who has nothing, who is naked, houseless, without a hearth, squalid, without a slave, without a city, can pass a life that flows easily? See, God has sent you a man to show you by his acts that it is possible. Look at me, who am without city, without a house, without possessions, without a slave; I sleep on the ground, I have no wife, no children, no praetorium, but only the earth and heavens, and one poor cloak. And what do I want? Am I not without sorrow? am I not without fear? am I not free? When did any of you see me failing in the object of my desire? or falling into that which I would avoid? Did I ever blame God or man? did I

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* § 81-82.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* § 26-27.

ever accuse any man? did any of you ever see me with a sorrowful countenance? And how do I meet with those whom you are afraid of and admire? Do I not treat them like slaves? Who, when he sees me, does not think that he sees his king and master?"<sup>27</sup>

To become a true Cynic "in the first place, in the things which relate to yourself, you must not be in any respect like what you are now: you must not blame God or man: you must take away desire altogether, you must transfer avoidance only to the things which are within the power of the will: you must not feel anger nor resentment nor envy nor pity; a girl must not appear handsome to you, nor must you love a little reputation, nor be pleased with a boy or a cake."<sup>28</sup>

Since the Cynic has this high calling of reproving other people's vices, he must be very careful to suppress his own. As Epictetus says:

"Before all, the Cynic's ruling faculty must be purer than the sun; and if it is not, he must necessarily be a cunning knave and a fellow of no principle, since while he is himself entangled in some vice he will reprove others. For see how the matter stands: to these kings and tyrants, their guards and arms give the power of reproving some persons, and of being able even to punish those who do wrong, though they are themselves bad; but to a Cynic, instead of arms and guards, it is conscience which gives this power. When he knows that he has watched and labored for mankind, and has slept pure, and sleep has left him still purer, and that he has thought whatever he has thought as a friend of the gods, as a minister, as a participator of the power of Zeus, and that on all occasions he is ready to say, 'Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny'; and also, if it so pleases the gods, so let it be; why should he not have confidence to speak freely to his own brothers, to his children, in a word, to his kinsmen?"<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* § 45-49.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* § 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* § 93-96.

The Cynic, above all men, must not indulge in the comforts of civilization, even friendship: this is not only because these are really not good, but also because he must give all his strength to following his high calling. A young man asked Epictetus if a Cynic, when sick, might go to the house of a friend to be cared for, and received as a reply:

"And where shall you find, I ask, a Cynic's friend? For the man who invites ought to be such another as the Cynic, that he may be worthy of being reckoned the Cynic's friend. He ought to be a partner in the Cynic's scepter and his royalty, and a worthy minister, if he intends to be considered worthy of a Cynic's friendship, as Diogenes was a friend of Antisthenes, as Crates was a friend of Diogenes. Do you think that if a man comes to a Cynic and salutes him, that he is the Cynic's friend, and that the Cynic will think him worthy of receiving a Cynic into his house? So that if you please, reflect on this also: rather look around for some convenient dunghill upon which you shall bear your fever and which will shelter you from the north wind that you may not be chilled. But you seem to me to wish to go to some man's house and to be well fed there for a time. Why then do you think of attempting so great a thing as the life of a Cynic?"<sup>30</sup>

Nor is marriage permitted to a true Cynic: a wife and children would impose upon him cares and duties which he has not the right to take,<sup>31</sup> for his services are demanded for all humanity, who are his children. What the Cynic gives society is of more value than many children.

"In the name of God, are those men greater benefactors to society who introduce into the world to occupy their own pleasures two or three grunting children, or those who superintend, as far as they can, all mankind, and see what they do, how they live, what they attend to, what they neglect contrary to their duty."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* § 62-66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* § 69ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* § 77.



But Epictetus has the sharpest criticism for the Cynics of his day. He speaks with contempt of "the present Cynics who are dogs that wait at tables, and in no respect imitate the Cynics of old, except perhaps in breaking wind, but in nothing else."<sup>33</sup> He denounces the dirtiness which was so characteristic of the Cynics of his day, and urges all true Cynics to maintain a respectable appearance.

"It is necessary for a Cynic to have a certain habit of body: for if he appears to be consumptive, thin and pale, his testimony has not then the same weight. For he must not only by showing the qualities of his soul prove to the vulgar that it is in his power, independent of the things which they admire, to be a good man, but he must also show by his body that his simple and frugal way of living in the open air does not even injure the body. See, he says, I am a proof of this, and my own body also is. So Diogenes used to do, for he used to go about fresh-looking, and he attracted the notice of many by his personal appearance. But if a Cynic is an object of compassion, he seems to be a beggar: all persons turn away from him. He ought not to appear dirty, so as not to drive away men by it; but his very roughness ought to be clean and attractive."<sup>34</sup>

During this same period, there were many other popular teachers who were not avowed Cynics, but who shared many of their doctrines and methods of teaching. One of these, who lived in the early years of the Roman Empire, was Musonius Rufus. The fragments of his diatribes which remain fill only a small book, but one of these is entitled *περὶ ἀσκήσεως*, and well serves to show how much he was in sympathy with the ideas already described. His idea of virtue was a very practical one, requiring constant effort and practice, or *ἀσκησις*. "He strongly urged askesis upon those hearing him, always using these words: 'Virtue,' he would say, 'is not theoretical knowledge only, but also practical, like medicine or music.'<sup>35</sup> Then through several pages his

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* § 80.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* § 86-89.

<sup>35</sup> Muson. p. 22, ed. Hense.

idea of the ascetic life is developed, in terms which parallel those of his contemporaries. "The ascetic must lead a superior life, not be pleased with pleasure, nor avoid pain, not love life nor fear death, and not esteem possessions so much that he will set himself to acquiring them."<sup>36</sup>

Contemporary with this revival of Cynicism, came a revival of Pythagoreanism as a popular ethical system. The older Pythagoreanism had continued down to the end of the fourth century, for frequent references to abstinence from beans and flesh are found in the Middle Comedy,<sup>37</sup> but during the two following centuries we hear very little of the school and its tenets. In the last century before our era, however, there was a great revival of interest in the Pythagorean rule of life, and from that time until the end of the antique world, the tradition remained unbroken. A fragment of Alexander Polyhistor speaks of Neo-Pythagoreans in his time (B.C. 80-69);<sup>38</sup> a contemporary of Cicero, Nigidius Figulus, established the school at Rome. After that time the number of Neo-Pythagoreans was more numerous: in the first century there were Apollonius of Tyana and Moderatus as the most eminent, in the second century, Nichomachus and Numenius, in the third, Philostratus, while others, such as Jamblichus and Porphyry, were profoundly interested in these doctrines.

At this period the school was of a popular nature. Many of its teachers, like Apollonius of Tyana, went about in a manner almost like that of the Cynics, just described; others adopted more literary methods of propaganda, and wrote numerous popular books, such as the numerous lives of Pythagoras,<sup>39</sup> Philostratus's life of Apollonius, or Porphyry's tract

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Vid. sup.*, p. 42, n. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Diog. Laert. VIII 24ff.

<sup>39</sup> Lives were written by Moderatus, Nichomachus, Antonius, Apollonius, Porphyry, Jamblichus, etc. Cf. Rohde, *Die Quellen des Jamblichus in seiner Biographie des Pythagoras*, in *Kleine Schriften*, II, pp. 102-172.

against animal food. Some members of the school, it is to be admitted, were more profound philosophers, and developed ideas upon the One and the Many, and God and Matter, which were used by the Neo-Platonists later, but for most of its members, the Neo-Pythagorean school confined itself to offering the Pythagorean rule as a guide to life.

This rule was supposed to be the one taught by Pythagoras himself. Here are the terms in which Jamblichus described the teaching of the master: "the best polity, popular concord, community of possessions among friends, the worship of the gods, piety to the dead, legislation, erudition, silence, abstinence from animals, continence, temperance, sagacity, divinity, and in a word, whatever is sought after by lovers of learning, was brought to light by Pythagoras."<sup>40</sup> The ascetic features of the rule were obvious: five years of silent contemplation were demanded,<sup>41</sup> meat or beans could not be eaten,<sup>42</sup> and abstinence from wine was required;<sup>43</sup> some went beyond the letter of the rule, and rejected marriage.<sup>44</sup>

These two distinct schools show how great was the propaganda during the early part of the Roman Empire which taught the renunciation of the goods of this world, and urged a veritably ascetic mode of life. The two schools which have been mentioned, the Cynics and the Neo-Pythagoreans, exemplified these tendencies more clearly than any others, but they were not unique. There was a host of other popular preachers, who attached themselves to no school in particular, but who taught the same doctrines that have already been outlined. One example of this type is the celebrated Dion Chrysostom, whose preserved orations contain ascetic sentiments in great quantities, but ones differing but little from what has already been seen.<sup>45</sup> Another example of the popu-

<sup>40</sup> Jamb. *Vit. Pyth.* 6, cf. 20ff.

<sup>41</sup> Philostr. *Vit. Apol.* I 14; Luc. *Vit. Auct.* 3.

<sup>42</sup> Philostr. I 8, 21; II 6, 26, etc.; Luc. *Vit. Auct.* 6.

<sup>43</sup> Philostr. I 8; II 7; etc.

<sup>44</sup> Philostr. I 13.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. von Arnim, *Das Leben und Werke des Dion von Prusa* (1898).

lar teaching of the day is found in Seneca's account of his early training, which is worth quoting in full.

"Indeed, as I heard Attalus declaiming against the vices, the errors and the evil of life, I frequently bewailed the human race, and I believed him sublime and above human rank. He said of himself that he was king. But to me he seemed something more, for he justly censured kings. When he commenced to commend poverty, and to show that whatever was superfluous was an unnecessary burden and hardly to be borne, it frequently seemed pleasant to go forth from the school poor. When he commenced to accuse our pleasures and to praise a chaste body, a sober table, and a mind free not only from illicit pleasures but also from superfluous ones, it was pleasant to restrain gluttony and the belly. A part of this still persists with me, Luculus, for I approached all with great enthusiasm. When reduced to civil life, I retained a few of the things thus well begun. Because of this, I have renounced oysters and mushrooms during my whole life. For they are not food but amusement, encouraging those who are already filled to eat more, which is most pleasant to the gluttonous and those stuffing themselves with more than they can hold, as they descend readily and are as readily given back. Because of this, I have, during my whole life, abstained from perfume, since the best odor for the body is none at all. Because of this, my stomach has ever gone without wine. Because of this, I have fled warm baths all my life, believing that they weaken the body, while seething it is a useless and over delicate thing. Though I have broken off from complete abstinence from certain other things, there remains a severe rule of life which is almost abstinence, and which may even be more difficult, since it is easier to cut some things off from the soul altogether than to temper them.

"Since I have begun to explain to you with how much greater enthusiasm I approached philosophy as a youth than I now proceed with it as an old man, I shall not shame to say with what love Pythagoras inspired me. Sotion told me why he had abstained from animals, and why Sextius subsequently did. Their reasons were different, but both were magnificent. . . . When

Sotion had exposed these things and completed them with arguments of his own, he used to say, 'Do you not believe that souls are placed in other bodies and other things, and that what we call death is a migration? Do you not believe that what was formerly the soul of a man still survives in the beasts or cattle or the fish of the sea? Do you not believe that nothing perishes in this world, but only changes place? and that the celestial bodies are not turned through given orbits any more than animate ones go through their changes in order and are driven through the world to souls? Great men have believed that. Therefore, suspend your judgment for a while and think these matters over carefully. If things really are thus, to abstain from animals is innocense; if this is false, to do so is frugality. What part of your credulity is destroyed here? I snatch from you the food of lions and vultures.' Incited by such exhortations, I commenced to abstain from animals, and after the lapse of a year, this custom was not only easy for me but also pleasant. I believed that my mind was more active, nor today can I affirm that this was not the case. Do you ask how I came to stop? Well, the period of my youth fell in the first years of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. At that time foreign priests were expelled, and among the arguments for their superstition was placed the abstinence of some of them from meat. So upon being requested by my father, who did not fear calumny but who hated philosophy, I returned to my original custom. Nor was it hard for him to persuade me to take up a better fare.

"Attalus also used to praise a mattress which would resist the body: even as an old man, I use one in which an impression cannot remain. I have related these things in order that I might prove to you how eagerly the young recruits receive the first impulse towards the good."<sup>46</sup>

The question of the origin of this asceticism is a complicated one. It has been seen that Cynicism and Pythagoreanism traced their origins back to the earlier period of Greek history, the one to certain phases of the Socratic teaching, and the other to the Greek Pythagoras. To a great extent the

<sup>46</sup> Sen. *Ep. ad Luc.* 108, 13-17, 20-23.

movement was the development of germs found in Greece from early times; social conditions became such that a teaching of the slight value of worldly gains became desirable, so certain persons developed these previously existing germs. But on the other hand, it has been seen that at just this time there was a great influx of oriental ascetics into the Empire: their asceticism, too, had the redeeming features which were so sorely needed by the age, and must have suggested many things to their contemporary Greek fellow teachers. As a matter of fact, if the teaching of these Greek schools is examined, many traces of such oriental influence will be observed. The similarities between the Cynics and the Galli are patent, and undoubtedly many Cynics consciously imitated these worshippers of Cybele. It is a very significant fact that Peregrinus underwent his severest asceticism in Egypt where, as has been seen, native asceticism was strong, and tended towards the extravagances recorded of Peregrinus during his stay there. Many of the ascetic practices indulged in at this period were quite foreign to occidental peoples: Seneca objected to ascetics who castrated themselves,<sup>47</sup> but this act was something unknown to the Greeks and Romans, so was undoubtedly suggested by the orientals. It may even be asked whether the "scrupulous filthiness" of the later Cynics was not an imported feature, for, as Epictetus has been seen to point out, this was foreign to Diogenes. The lives of Pythagoras dating from this period say that he learned his wisdom from the Egyptians and Babylonians; the first books of Philostratus's life of Apollonius are devoted to a journey he is said to have made to India to learn the wisdom of the Hindus—which wisdom was of course ascetic: these trips to India became very common in the popular literature of the day, and stories of Indian ascetics became very current.

Among these Indian stories, that of Calenus, an Indian who immolated himself in the time of Augustus, thus becom-

<sup>47</sup> *Nat. Q.* vii 31, 3.

ing a hero for many, and perhaps suggesting the idea to Peregrinus, is a pre-eminent one. Strabo tells the story of how he came with an embassy to Augustus, and while at Athens, in the presence of an astonished crowd and perhaps of the Emperor himself, he anointed himself and leaped smilingly upon a pyre. A tomb was raised which was visible as late as the age of Plutarch, upon which his self-immolation was recorded. How much attention this act attracted in the west is shown by the numerous references to it in literature;<sup>48</sup> Josephus even makes his hero Eleazer hold Calanus up as a model to his men,<sup>49</sup> and it has been suggested that St. Paul had his act in mind when he wrote, "And if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing."<sup>50</sup>

It is safe to conclude, therefore, that a considerable oriental influence was exercised in the development of this popular asceticism of the time of the Roman Empire. But it is also clear that this oriental influence only modified the form in which the Greek ascetic ideas were expressed: it did not bring the asceticism itself into being: the social condition of the Roman Empire did that. Nor did it contribute the fundamental ideas upon which this asceticism was based, for these have been observed in Greece long before this oriental influence could have begun. Orientals suggested a few extravagant acts for outwardly expressing these ideas, but it was the Greeks themselves who contributed the idea that all mundane things are to be considered as useless or worse, and that the body and its cares are the greatest enemy to the soul and virtue.

It may be remarked here, too, that the early Christians eagerly seized upon both oriental expression and Greek idea, for they found in them a most valuable corollary to their teaching of another world—an idea which received little attention among the Greeks whom we have just been studying.

<sup>48</sup> Strabo xv 1, 73 (270); 4 (686); Dion Cass. 66, 9; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 69; Clem. Alex. *Strom.* iv 571; Aelian *Var. Hist.* v. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Jos. *Bell. Jud.* vii 87.

<sup>50</sup> Lightfoot, *Colossians*, p. 394, n. 2.

## CHAPTER VI

### PHILOSOPHICAL ASCETICISM

In the preceding chapter it was seen how, beginning in the last century before Christ, large numbers of people began to give themselves over to all sorts of ascetic practices; from the opening of this century until the end of the pagan world, such practices became ever more popular. The persons who did such things, however, did not do them from strictly religious motives, but rather from ethical ones: the asceticism which has been described was a distinctly ethical asceticism. Two different sorts of asceticism have been found in the Roman Empire, then, one religious and largely oriental, the other ethical, and more distinctly Greek—though it too was influenced by oriental forces. But there was a third sort as well, which must be described before the present study will be complete.

In general, the persons whose activities were described in the last chapter were not very philosophic persons; they were not the sort who would think things through and formulate a reasoned exposition of the grounds for their conduct; they were content to invoke a few general conceptions and let it go at that. But at the same time there were other persons, likewise interested in asceticism, who were more deep-thinking. These latter were profoundly influenced by the more popular asceticism which they saw about them, and which was undoubtedly the determining cause of their own, but owing to their character, they could not rest content until they had worked out a rationale of the whole thing. These more philosophic persons therefore formulated a philosophy of asceticism which stated in enduring terms the confusedly-



felt aspirations of the popular ascetics of their day. Not only do they serve to clarify this popular movement, but they also show how great a part of the attention of even the highly intellectual classes was devoted to such subjects: after the time of Christ, all the great thinkers gave much attention to the subject, doing so to a greater and greater extent as time went on, so that it is possible to say that all the philosophy of fading Hellas was a philosophy of asceticism.

During the period of the Roman Empire, two philosophies predominated, Stoicism and Neo-Platonism. Of course there were many others, but the eclecticism<sup>1</sup> of the time was so great that nearly all the schools shared much the same ideas, and differed only in the emphasis which they placed upon one idea or another; much the same results might be obtained by a study of others, but the ones which developed the ascetic side the most, and which are therefore best adapted for our present purposes, are the ones just mentioned.

The Stoic school arose at the end of the fourth century as a development of Cynicism. Zeno, its founder, had been attracted towards the Cynics in his youth, and both he and his followers always had a high opinion of Cynic virtue. Many of the fundamental Cynic ideas, such as those of self-sufficiency, impassibility, indifference to externals, were incorporated into Stoicism; the chief difference between the two schools, in fact, lay in the polemic nature of the Cynics, which the Stoics did not share. The early Stoics, Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus, did not give great attention to asceticism, and as much may be said for their successors in what is sometimes called the Middle Stoa, which is marked by Panaetius and Posidonius, who flourished, the former in the last half of the second century, the latter in the first half of the first B.C. But, as has been seen, there was not much asceticism of any kind at this period. This absence of philo-

<sup>1</sup> The volume of Zeller which deals with the first part of this period is called *Eclecticism*, in the English translation.

sophical asceticism merely parallels the absence of any other kind, and the general prosperous condition of the Hellenistic world. By the time of Posidonius, however, the ascetic movement was beginning again, and he is not without importance for later development. With him a new spirit was brought into Stoic thought, and into all Greek speculation for that matter, which was destined to have a great effect upon subsequent philosophers, for his thought was what served as the foundation upon which the later theorists of asceticism built.<sup>2</sup>

Posidonius was born at Apamea, a Greek city in Syria, about 135 B.C. While still a boy he went to Athens where he studied philosophy with Panaetius (m.c. 109) and others, and then travelled extensively, going as far as Spain and Upper Egypt. He finally settled in Rhodes, of which city he became a citizen, and there taught philosophy during the remainder of his life. Ancient authors refer to twenty-four books said to have been written by him, but of these only a few fragments remain,<sup>3</sup> largely preserved in the writings of his personal friend Cicero. We do not know the details of his doctrines, therefore, but we do know that these doctrines had an enormous influence upon subsequent writers, Cicero, Seneca, Varro, Philo of Alexandria, Plutarch and others. But throughout, Posidonius's originality was slight; he did not invent the ideas which he set forth, but collected them. For this reason, some take "Posidonius" as the name of a body of ideas then current, of a tradition, rather than of a person.<sup>4</sup>

Having been a Syrian by birth, Posidonius is believed by some to have been influential in introducing a stream of oriental mysticism into Greek thought. It is undeniable that

<sup>2</sup> The best modern accounts of Posidonius are in Schmekel, *Philosophie der mittleren Stoa* (1892) esp. pp. 238-90, and Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics* (1913), ch. iii.

<sup>3</sup> *Posidonii Rhodii reliquae doctrinae*, ed. Bake, 1810.

<sup>4</sup> Bevan, p. 96.

just such a mysticism did begin to appear in occidental speculation at this time, and it is also certain that Posidonius's thought contained many mystical elements,<sup>5</sup> but it cannot be proved that these were of oriental origin: they might equally well have been derived from Plato. Posidonius left his oriental home while still a boy, so he had probably not penetrated deeply into the wisdom of his country, while it is known that his thought was in other respects profoundly influenced by Plato. But whatever its source may have been, it is clear that a considerable amount of mysticism was introduced into Stoicism at this time, so if we take the word Posidonius in the very broad sense of a tradition then current, oriental influences may have been an important factor, even though most of the tradition came from Greek predecessors. It is this mysticism which makes the period important for the student of asceticism, for mysticism and asceticism are always kindred things, appealing to the same type of mind.

It is impossible to find any direct teaching about asceticism in the fragments of Posidonius; his importance rather lies in the fact that he formulated a theory of the world and its nature which was generally accepted by later thinkers. As they made it the foundation of their more strictly ascetical speculation, a brief description of it is required here.

Posidonius varied to a certain extent from the strict monism of the earlier Stoics by dividing all things into two categories, things with bodies and things without bodies, matter and spirit. However, both were derived from an original being, a sort of fiery breath, the giver of life and reason, eternal and divine. This divided into spirit and matter. The former was supposed to be infused throughout the latter, giving it form and life. The conventional Greek division of things into four elements, earth, air, fire and water, was accepted. The elements were supposed to be

<sup>5</sup> Schmekel, pp. 400ff.

arranged in the order of their density, with earth at the center, surrounded by water, then by air, and finally by the fire outside of all. Thus the one farthest from the earth was the purest and the least deviated from its divine origin. As was said, spirit was to be found in all sorts of matter; everything was alive; the world itself had a soul; but this was especially true of plants, still truer of animals, and above all the case with men. The dual nature of man was so marked that he was in a class by himself, far above animals, and even resembling the divine, because of the unusual quality of his soul. Men's souls were of the same nature as the divinity,<sup>6</sup> an etherial breath;<sup>7</sup> they were therefore in sharp contradistinction to the body, which was but matter, and useless and rotten flesh,<sup>8</sup> the support, however, of the God dwelling in man.<sup>9</sup> The body was therefore only a chain for the soul which hindered and impeded its free movement.<sup>10</sup> The soul was really independent of the body, having existed before it and having come to it for the time being, and would undoubtedly continue to exist after it.<sup>11</sup> From this followed his rule of ethics: each part of man should (following the Cynic-Stoic dictum) live according to nature, which might be reduced to saying that man should seek the true and the good, the truth as the end of the activity of the spirit, the good that of the body;<sup>12</sup> these two made up virtue. But owing to the superior quality of spirit, its activity was considered superior too: in the final analysis, the really virtuous man was the sage. This briefly is the theory of the nature of the world and man which is behind most of the thought of Greek thinkers who came after Posidonius.

<sup>6</sup> Cic. *Tusc.* I 24, 56-28, 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* I 17, 40; 18, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Sen. *Ep.* 92, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Cic. *Nat. Deor.* II 9, 24ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cic. *Div.* I 49, 110.

<sup>11</sup> Cic. *Tusc.* I 12, 27ff.; 22, 53ff.

<sup>12</sup> Clem. Al. *Strom.* II 416b.

II. The best illustration of what the Stoics thought about asceticism in the first years of the Empire is found in Seneca; he is typical of the time, giving in a concentrated form the essence of the Stoicism which was the prevailing philosophy of his day. Just as Nero's household, of which he was an inmate, demonstrated in a concentrated form the tendencies which were prevailing in the whole Roman Empire and which were already heading it towards ruin (though moralizing historians since the days of Tacitus may have exaggerated the vice of Nero's court), so the philosophy of Seneca, which was his reaction to the life at court, represented in a concentrated form the philosophical ideas which prevailed among large classes of persons throughout the world, and which gave the age its general tone. It is certain that the type of thought which Seneca represents was popular throughout the Roman Empire at the time, so his asceticism may be taken as typical of the ascetic tendencies of the period.

Seneca was born at Cordova, in Spain, practically at the opening of the Christian era. In the reign of Augustus his father came to Rome as a rhetor. During his early life, Seneca held several public offices, but in 41 A.D. he was banished to Corsica, where he remained for eight years. At length he was recalled, however, in 49, by the Empress Agrippina, who made him the tutor of her son Nero. Upon the ascension of the latter upon the throne of the Empire, Seneca and his colleague Burrus virtually ruled the world. For a while, all went well. But presently things changed, and began to grow rapidly worse, and Seneca wished to withdraw from court. He had amassed an enormous fortune, which became a scandal to others, and Seneca felt the reproach deeply. He wished to give it up, but Nero forbade him either to resign his wealth or to leave Rome. From that time on, his life lay in Nero's hands, as Seneca was perfectly well aware. He devoted himself during the remainder of his life to literary pursuits: among the various products of

the time are his letters to Luculus, which contain the best exposition of his philosophy, and particularly of its ascetical features. At length the order came, and Seneca committed suicide in the year 66.<sup>13</sup>

From his youth upwards, Seneca had received philosophical instruction. In one of his letters to Luculus, in a passage quoted in the last chapter, he tells in detail of his early studies. In this passage he describes his rigorous mode of life, his abstinence from all delicacies which might tend to soften the body, and from all fresh food, and in general, shows himself an enthusiastic adept of the popular philosophy of the time. If as a youth Seneca received such instruction with enthusiasm, it is no wonder that in his old age he gave asceticism a considerable place in his philosophy. But as with preceding ascetical philosophers, his asceticism was an integral part of his philosophy, and a logical deduction from its basic propositions, so it cannot be adequately understood apart from the rest.

The starting point of his philosophy—and of all the other philosophies of the time, for that matter, as was but natural—was a consideration of the transitoriness and uncertainty of all things. There seemed to be nothing in the world in which a man could have confidence. Even if things appear for the moment to be calm, he argued, one never knows what will come next: “do not trust this tranquility,” he warned Luculus, “the sea is changed in a moment.”<sup>14</sup> Nor is human nature itself any more certain: “we waver between various plans; we wish nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing always. ‘It is folly,’ you say, ‘to which nothing is constant, and is pleased long with nothing.’”<sup>15</sup> In such a state of affairs, a remedy must be sought, to make life bearable: since

<sup>13</sup> For the relation of Seneca’s philosophy to his times, see Glover, *The Conflict of Religions in the Roman Empire* (1909), ch. ii; cf. Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, Bk. 3, ch. i.

<sup>14</sup> *Ep.* 4, 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ep.* 52, 1.

all the things in this world are transitory, "seek something more amenable to the good; but there is nothing that is this except what the soul finds within itself; virtue alone offers a sure and eternal pleasure."<sup>16</sup> In this sentence is the essence of his whole philosophy: to attain happiness, one should forsake external things and seek the things of the soul, or virtue, for they alone are eternal. "Do not take pleasure in vain things: I said this was the foundation of philosophy: it is its apex."<sup>17</sup> "No one is able to live securely who thinks too much of procuring things, who counts many years among good things; meditate daily how you may leave life with a calm mind."<sup>18</sup> "Philosophy will persuade you not to sit at the counting desk."<sup>19</sup> In one place he says, "If you wish to have your soul free, you must be poor, or as though you were poor."<sup>20</sup> But it is not necessary to live in penury; it is enough to be "as though you were poor." In another passage, he says that one should have sufficient to live: "'what is the measure of riches?' you ask: first to have what is necessary, then to have what is sufficient."<sup>21</sup> All that he means to say is that one should not attach himself to these external things. Among these things to which a wise man will not attach himself is life itself: "I advise you this, not only as a remedy for disease but also for all life: despise death. Nothing is sad when we have fled this fear."<sup>22</sup> The gods have no use for external things, so why should the sage?<sup>23</sup> He will care only for virtue, and what is virtuous, even though it be painful, is what he will seek and all that he will seek.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Ep.* 27, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ep.* 23, 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ep.* 4, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ep.* 17, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ep.* 17, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ep.* 2, 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ep.* 78, 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ep.* 76, 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Ep.* 71, 21.

These ideas were all based upon the old Cynic teaching that one should forswear the goods of civilization and live according to nature: "indeed, it is our purpose to live according to nature," said Seneca.<sup>25</sup> If one has this determination, and also has, as the Stoics did have, a clear conception of the necessity of nature, he will always wish to act in harmony with it: "the wise man does nothing unwillingly; he escapes necessity, for he desires what is necessary."<sup>26</sup> Parallel with this, or rather, as a consequence of it, was the great emphasis which was placed upon reason. "If you wish to submit all things to yourself, submit yourself to reason; you will rule many things if reason rules you."<sup>27</sup> But this reasonableness is not only practical: reason being the highest part of man, its perfection is the highest perfection. "It is well if the reason is set free and right, and accommodates the will to its nature. For as reason alone perfects a man, so perfect reason alone makes him happy."<sup>28</sup> "You rejoice that you are improving and calm; yet that joy is a very different one which comes from the contemplation of a resplendent mind, pure from all defilement."<sup>29</sup> But reason is more than the highest part of man: it is an element of the divine within him. "Reason is nothing other than a part of the divine spirit placed in the human body."<sup>30</sup> Thus reappears the old Stoic doctrine of the *Spermatic Logos* and its incarnation in man.

This importance of reason led to a great emphasis upon the personality or individuality of a man, upon his soul. Since reason was considered the most important part of man, and was internal, and since all external things were vain, men were urged to rely upon their own souls, to withdraw

<sup>25</sup> *Ep.* 5, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ep.* 54, 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ep.* 37, 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ep.* 76, 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 4, 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ep.* 66, 12.



within themselves. "Withdraw into yourself as much as you are able; commune with those things which will make you better."<sup>31</sup> Also, it was taught that a man should be judged by these internal things only: "when you wish to arrive at a true estimation of a man, and to know what sort he is, regard him naked: let him set aside his inheritance, his honors and the other lies of nature, and let him divest himself of his body itself: regard the soul, as to what sort and how great it is, and whether its greatness is due to him or someone else."<sup>32</sup> Corollary with this was the teaching that a man should show himself independent even of other men: the greatest contempt is shown for the *turba*. It is said to be the incarnation of foolishness and vice. The sage will flee it.<sup>33</sup>

The reward which awaits him who does this is freedom, "perpetual liberty, and dread (timor) of neither man nor god."<sup>34</sup> In a splendid passage, Seneca speaks of the reward which a sage may expect, and in it, he sums up a good deal of his philosophy. "And how great a recompense awaits, if we break off from our preoccupations and most tenacious evils. Neither passion nor fear disturbs us. Unmoved by terrors, uncorrupted by vices, we shall dread neither death nor the gods: we shall know that death is not an evil and that the gods are not bad: for that is weak which harms, rather than that which is harmed. The best lack evil power. There awaits us, if hereafter we go from this debased to that lofty state, tranquility of soul and, after all delusions have been expelled, absolute liberty. Do you ask what these mean? Not to dread either men or gods; to wish nothing base or superfluous; to have the greatest power in oneself: for it is an inestimable good to be made master of oneself."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ep.* 7, 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ep.* 76, 32.

<sup>33</sup> *Ep.* 7, 1, 2; 8, 1, 2; *de Otio* 8, 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ep.* 17, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ep.* 75, 16-18.

Upon this foundation, teaching the vanity of all external things, and exalting to the skies the gloriousness of the individual soul, Seneca's asceticism was built. The end of life, he taught, is virtue, but few men ever attain it. His ascetical philosophy aimed to point out the way which one should follow to attain it.

In the first place, all men are sinners: "*peccavimus*," he says.<sup>36</sup> But though this statement may be enlightening, it does not aid greatly in remedying the situation, except in so far as it emphasizes the fact that there is a situation to be remedied. It is more important to know why all men are sinners. "What is it, Luculus," he asks, "which drags us one way when we want to go another, and forces us towards that from which we wish to recede?"<sup>37</sup> The answer is that "many things bind us, many things maim us. As long as we are buried in vices, it is difficult to be saved. We are not impure, but poisoned."<sup>38</sup> The real cause of sin is that men do not realize the vanity of everything, but are constantly wanting things; in good Buddhist fashion, he teaches that desire is the root of all evil: he quotes with approval from Hecaton, "you will cease fearing if you cease desiring."<sup>39</sup> The trouble with men is that they do not heed the teaching of philosophy.

The life which a philosopher should lead, and the one led by ordinary people are two absolutely incompatible modes of life; in the manner of so many of his contemporaries, he compares them to two cities.<sup>40</sup> One is the ordinary everyday world of transitoriness and discord and sordidness; the other the real and spiritual world. He urges his friend Luculus to "ascend from this world to that." "As great as is the difference between their splendor and light—and one

<sup>36</sup> *de Clem.* i 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ep.* 52, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ep.* 59, 9.

<sup>39</sup> *Ep.* 5, 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ep.* 68, 2; *de Otio* iv.

has its own certain source of light, but the other shines by the light of the first—so great is the difference between this life and that: the present one is illuminated by light coming from without and whoever comes makes a thick shadow; that one is illuminated by its own light.”<sup>41</sup>

This other life is the one which every man, or at least every philosopher, should seek to lead; this other city is the one in which he should seek to establish his true citizenship. But this is by no means an easy task: it requires constant struggle and warfare on the part of the philosopher. “It would make you laugh if someone should tell you that the struggle is gentle and easy. I do not wish to deceive you. The expression is the same for this most glorious profession, and that most base one [of gladiator]: ‘to practice (*usi* = *ἀσκεῖν*), to conquer and to be slain by the sword.’ It might better be avoided by those who place themselves in the arena, and who eat and drink what they gain by blood, for they suffer such things unwillingly; but when said by you, it is not base, for you endure willingly and freely. They are allowed to throw down their arms and demand mercy of the people, but you may neither surrender nor ask for your life.”<sup>42</sup> The life of the philosopher is like that of the soldier, and both should be terminated with the word “*Vici!*” “Do you ask whom you are to conquer? Not the Persians nor the farthest of the Medes nor whatever warlike people lies beyond the Dahae, but avarice, ambition and fear of the death which conquers the conquerors of peoples.”<sup>43</sup> He bids men endure the buffetings of fate by remembering that “no athlete is able to approach the struggle who has never been beaten black and blue.”<sup>44</sup> One of his arguments for a rigorous mode of life is that “the strongest soldiers come from the rough country, while the lazy ones come from the city. The more severe

<sup>41</sup> *Ep.* 21, 1–2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ep.* 37, 1–2; cf. 96, 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ep.* 71, 37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ep.* 13, 2.

discipline of the country strengthens their nature, and makes it suitable for greater endeavours."<sup>45</sup> Finally, no one is able to attain the good things which lead to a happy life unless "one is regardless of labor," but if one does persevere, he will at last succeed, and receive a reward which is comparable to a victor's crown.<sup>46</sup>

To attain this crown, the essential thing is to cultivate virtue and flee from vice. Now, like the good ascetic that he is, and like the faithful descendant of the Greek tradition that he also is, Seneca associates the former with the internal and invisible soul, and the latter with the external and visible body. Thus he arrives at the distinction of soul and body, with the corollary doctrine of the infinite superiority of the former: he who would seek virtue, and he who would sin no more, must cease caring for the body.

In a number of passages, Seneca points out the baseness of the body. "Leave the body, as something rotten."<sup>47</sup> "It is useless and decaying flesh, good only for receiving food, as Posidonius said."<sup>48</sup> "Restrain your body as much as you are able, and give the place to the soul."<sup>49</sup> "The body is to be treated severely, lest the soul perish miserably."<sup>50</sup> He speaks of the body as "corpusculum," and says that "even if nothing can be done without it, consider it a necessary thing rather than a great one."<sup>51</sup> It is able to and does make life miserable,<sup>52</sup> and is a punishment.<sup>53</sup> "The body is a burden to the soul and a punishment; the soul is constantly distressed by it and in its chains,"<sup>54</sup> a doctrine familiar since the

<sup>45</sup> *Ep.* 51, 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> *Ep.* 78, 16, 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ep.* 120, 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Ep.* 92, 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Ep.* 15, 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ep.* 8, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ep.* 22, 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Ep.* 22, 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ep.* 120, 14.

<sup>54</sup> *Ep.* 65, 16.

advent of Orphism, but which Seneca undoubtedly took from Plato. "This little body is a jailer and chain for the soul."<sup>55</sup> "These bones which you see thrown about us, and the nerves and the skin stretched over them, and the face and hands and the other things in which we are enclosed, are chains and shadows of the soul. The soul is buried in them, it is choked, slain, turned from the truth and driven into falsity by them. All life is a bitter struggle with this flesh."<sup>56</sup> But Seneca remembers all the while that the body is a necessary thing, and says that one "may indulge the body as much as is necessary for good health."<sup>57</sup> "I admit that a care for our bodies is laid upon us; I admit that we have a wardship over them. I do not say that the body is not to be cared for; I deny that it is to be served. For he serves many things who serves the body, who fears it too much, who refers all things to it. If it is necessary for us to care for it, it is not that we should live for the sake of the body, but that we cannot live without it. Love of it disturbs us with fears, burdens us with cares, exposes us to injury. Honor is base to him to whom the body is too dear. We should most diligently control our concern for it, so that if reason demands, or dignity or honesty, we may consign it to the flames."<sup>58</sup> The body is therefore what is really at the bottom of all our troubles, and we would be better off without it: "if souls only remained free from bodies, their state would be happier than when they are in them."<sup>59</sup>

But the body, while being the chief source of evil, is not the only one. At other times he attributes wickedness to the things of the world, and particularly what he calls the "crowd": his contempt for this has already been mentioned, but he did not stop at contempt, but went on to teach that it

<sup>55</sup> *Dial.* xii 11, 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Dial.* vi 24, 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ep.* 8, 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ep.* 14, 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ep.* 76, 25.

was inherently wicked. "Do you inquire what I think you should particularly avoid? The crowd. Conversation with many is hurtful; there is no one who will not commend some vice or press it upon you, or color it over for you unawares. Therefore the greater the number of people we are associated with, the greater is our danger."<sup>60</sup> But the "crowd" is not the only thing either: from every quarter come temptations which seek to destroy us. "We should therefore direct our course so that we may be able to flee as far as possible from inducements to vice. The soul is to be toughened and withdrawn far from the allurements of pleasure. One winter undid Hannibal, and the delicacies of Campania effeminated the man unconquered by the snows of the Alps. He conquered with arms, but was conquered by vices."<sup>61</sup> A particular source of temptation he saw in the theater, which he, like Plato, condemned as subversive of good morals. "Really there is nothing so destructive to good morals as to sit in some theater. Because of the spectacle, vices break forth more easily."<sup>62</sup>

It was an orthodox Stoic doctrine that the sage is superior to external circumstances, for he will rise above them. Thus "Canopus does not prevent any one from being good, nor does Baia itself."<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, discretion is sometimes the better part of valor, and it is consequently desirable to flee temptation, as was shown in the quotations in the preceding paragraph: a philosophic retreat is urged, and he remarks that "no one thinking of a retreat would ever choose Canopus."<sup>64</sup> In several of his letters he expatiates upon the advantages of a retreat from the world and its justifications. "I approve of your plan: conceal yourself in ease—but also flee ease itself. If this is not to be justified from the prin-

<sup>60</sup> *Ep.* 7, 1–2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ep.* 51, 5–6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ep.* 7, 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ep.* 51, 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ep.* 51, 3.

ciples of the Stoics, you know that at least it is permitted from their example. But you may also do this according to their precepts; you will be approved both by yourself and whomever you wish. We should not concern ourselves with every matter, nor always nor unlimitedly. Moreover, as we Stoics give the wise man a commonwealth worthy of him, that is, the universe, he is not beyond public matters, even if he goes into retreat; but on the contrary, if only a small corner is left for him, it being placed in the heavens, he knows that he is in a greater place than before, when he ascended to the magistrate's seat or the tribunal, or when he sat in a humble place."<sup>65</sup> "Do you ask me what pleases me most of those things which I hear about you? It is when I hear nothing at all, and when many of those whom I question do not know what you are doing. It is a good thing to have nothing to do with different persons, and those desiring different things. . . . I am not afraid that they may change you, but that they may impede you."<sup>66</sup> "'You order me to avoid the crowd?' you ask, 'and to go into retreat? Where, then, are your precepts which say that we should die in action?' Well, what I seem to urge upon you, I perform myself, withdrawing and closing my doors, in order that I may be able to advance as much as possible. . . . I withdraw not so much from men as from things, and particularly from my own things: I work for posterity."<sup>67</sup>

This mere withdrawal from worldly affairs, however, was not all. Sometimes he made it include a life of ascetic discipline, at least upon certain days. "I should like to tempt the strength of your soul in another way," he wrote to Luculus, "and teach you something from the precepts of great men. Set apart certain days, upon which to be content with very little and vile food, and with rough and prickly clothing, so that you can say to yourself, 'Is this what was feared?' In

<sup>65</sup> *Ep.* 68, 1-2; cf. 36, 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ep.* 32, 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ep.* 8, 1-2.

its present security, the mind thus prepares itself for difficulties, and in the midst of benefits, strengthens itself against the injuries of fortune."<sup>68</sup> The justification here is as typical as the act justified.

Thus certain austerities are recommended as a valuable training. But Seneca was unwilling to recommend the excesses to which many persons were going in his day. "I warn you lest, after the manner of those who do not desire to progress but to be seen, you might do some things which would make your costume or manner of life notable. Avoid a cultivated filth, an unshorn head, a more neglected beard, an advertised contempt for money, a bed on the ground, and whatever else ambition seeks by a perverse way. . . . It is contrary to nature to rack the body, to hate an easy cleanliness, to seek filth, and to use food which is not so much cheap as offensive and horrid. . . . Philosophy demands temperance, not punishment, and there may be a decency of temperance. . . . He is great who uses clay in the same way as silver, nor is he less great who uses silver as though it were clay."<sup>69</sup> Going further, he was disgusted by the mutilations with which some zealots deformed themselves; "daily they contrive means by which injury may be done to virility, while others cut off their genitals."<sup>70</sup>

All the propositions which are fundamental to asceticism are to be found, therefore, in Seneca: the body is bad and to be suppressed, the world is the source of temptations and to be fled, austerities are to be indulged in as training. In all of this, Seneca was following the spirit of his time, and rationalizing what multitudes of persons were then doing, as was seen in the last chapter. He began his philosophic career, as was seen, by eagerly practicing this popular asceticism: his importance for the present study lies in the fact that in later life he developed from this the philosophy of

<sup>68</sup> *Ep.* 18, 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Ep.* 5, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6.

<sup>70</sup> *Nat. Ques.* vii 31, 3.



asceticism which has just been outlined, and thus stated the aspiration of the time in enduring words. He formulated a view of life which made asceticism seem reasonable and desirable, and which was destined to the greatest influence in subsequent history. The Christians found this view of life so congenial that they were unwilling to believe that its author was unacquainted with the Gospel, so forged a correspondence between him and St. Paul which even deceived Jerome and Augustine. And the sum and substance of this world-view was that the world itself is fleeting and not to be counted upon, and that the soul alone is stable and worthy of the care of a wise man; that the body and all else which interferes with the soul is to be shunned, or to receive as little attention as possible; and that the really great man is the one who neglects all for the cultivation of his soul. "Believe me, those who seem to do nothing are really doing the greatest things: they have to do at the same time with human things and divine."<sup>71</sup>

III. If the attempt were being made here to give a complete account of the asceticism of all the philosophical writers who later had an influence upon Christian ascetics, considerable space would have to be devoted at this point to Philo of Alexandria. For of all the writers of this period, Philo probably had the greatest influence upon his Christian successors,<sup>72</sup> and as asceticism plays a considerable rôle in his philosophical system, it is but natural that his theory of asceticism should be of equal importance. But as has already been pointed out several times, there is no intention of here discussing all the forerunners of Christian asceticism; we must confine ourselves to those who are obviously in the Greek tradition, that is, to those who received the majority at least of their opinions from Greeks, and who passed theirs on

<sup>71</sup> *Ep.* 8, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Conybeare, *Philo About the Contemplative Life* (1895). Pp. x, 330, 328ff.

to later Greeks. But Philo did neither of these things; he was born and brought up a Jew and received his inspiration from the Jews, though he took his material largely from the Greeks; on the other hand, he always remained unknown to later Greeks and his influence upon them was therefore insignificant. Consequently Philo was an offshoot from the Greek tradition, rather than a part of it, and outside the proper field of the present study. Nevertheless, Philo was a very typical representative of his time, and parts of his philosophy represented what many Greeks were thinking at the same time: in spite of his Jewish origin, Philo was profoundly affected by Greek speculation. It will not be wholly out of place, therefore, to summarize his ascetic thought briefly, even though nowhere near the amount of space is devoted to it which his influence upon Christian thought would justify, if a general history of asceticism were being written.<sup>73</sup>

In his moral system particularly, Philo was a Greek. He had taken over from the Stoics the idea of the possibility of moral progress, but the religious note in his system was much stronger than in theirs, for he made the whole progress culminate in an ecstatic union with God—an idea frequently found in the later mystics, and especially Plotinus. In his account of the different virtues, too, Philo merely followed the Stoics to a large extent. His portrait of the ideal sage, his emphasis upon internal, spiritual life (which is the center of his moral system) and his ideas in regard to human fraternity are as Stoical as is his abundant use of the allegorical method. But Philo's asceticism seems to have been taken from a more popular source, namely, the Cynics and such diatribe writers as Musonius.<sup>74</sup> For him, as for them, it was pleasure, the

<sup>73</sup> For an excellent account of the moral system of Philo, see Bréhier, *Les Idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (1907), Bk. 3, ch. 3, pp. 250-310; cf. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums* (1904), pp. 503ff.; Conybeare, *Op. cit.*, pp. 265ff.

<sup>74</sup> Wendland, *Philo und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (1895); Bréhier, pp. 261ff.

chief evil, which was the cause of the fall of man, and of all their vices and passions. Consequently, the most important virtue was the one which was opposed to pleasure, namely, temperance or continence. "He rejects and banishes all luxury from life; he finds his ideal of life realized in the community of Therapeutae. He regrets that the wise man cannot destroy the desire for food, and that human nature is driven to use food and drink."<sup>75</sup> He describes at length the internal combat in which one should engage against pleasure, passions and vices.<sup>76</sup> Virtue is to be acquired only after a long series of pains and efforts, which constitutes a veritable asceticism—both in the original sense of training and in the derived sense of abstention. This asceticism consisted in seeking virtue and in learning to despise false goods.<sup>77</sup> Different practices are recommended in different passages: reading, exercise, practice of the cult, meditation upon the good, the accomplishment of regular functions.<sup>78</sup> But the most important things are struggle against temptation and the inward life. This latter sometimes takes the form of retirement from the world<sup>79</sup>—though in general Philo disapproved of non-social hermits<sup>80</sup>—and sometimes of interior meditation.<sup>81</sup> By such acts, one was trained to live virtuously, just as the gladiator was trained for the contest.<sup>82</sup> By means of them, a man might hope to arrive at last at that state for which all should struggle, perfection.

At the same time as Philo (the last years before Christ and the first after) came the great revival of Pythagorean philosophy, which, as we have seen, contained a great deal of

<sup>75</sup> Bousset, p. 511; Philo. *Leg. All.* III 141ff.

<sup>76</sup> *Leg. All.* II 79-108; III 118-160; etc.

<sup>77</sup> *de cong. er. gr.* 24-34.

<sup>78</sup> *Leg. All.* I 18; *quis rer. div. her.* 253.

<sup>79</sup> *de leg. spec.* III 1; Bousset, p. 510.

<sup>80</sup> *de fuga* 33ff.; Bréhier, p. 268.

<sup>81</sup> *de gig.* 44.

<sup>82</sup> This figure, borrowed from the Cynics, is found frequently in Philo.

asceticism. Developing upon the number mysticism of the earlier Pythagoreans, they taught that the One was to be associated with God, and the Many with Matter, and from this they deduced philosophical principles recommending the subjugation of matter and a general asceticism. Continuing the old belief about the transmigration of souls, they argued for abstention from meat; their arguments for this are well shown in Jamblichus's work *On Abstention from Animal Food*.<sup>83</sup> But Neo-Pythagoreanism never became a widely accepted philosophy, especially in its metaphysical features. Most of the persons who interested themselves in it were like those who were described in the last chapter, who took it as a popular ethical system. Its real significance as a philosophy lies in the fact that it prepared the way for Neo-Platonism. Just as centuries before Pythagorism had led up to Platonism, so now the revised Pythagorism led up to a revised Platonism.

IV. It has already been shown how closely the thought of Plato was related to the environment which produced it: as a result of the activity of the sophists during the fifth century B.C., the old ideals and aspirations of the Athenians had been shattered, and their old values reduced to nought; to some minds, and especially to Plato's, this destructive work of the sophists seemed to lead to ruin, and the mainspring which drove his entire philosophical activity was the desire to show that ideals do have a real existence, in fact, a realer existence than any other things, and that they are more worthy of our efforts than anything else; this was the sum and substance of the Platonic teaching. But while this destructive work against which Plato revolted is generally laid to the sophists, it was really due to the general evolution of the times, and to the political and social situation of Athens. Now, during the closing centuries of the history of the pagan world, this

<sup>83</sup> For a general account of Neo-Pythagoreanism, see Zeller, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 110-139.

same situation was repeated. The Hellenic civilization was losing its force, and again old ideals were falling into decay. A reading of Lucian should convince anyone of that. As the present seemed unable to produce anything worth while, serious minds turned more and more to the past, and all sorts of methods were attempted to reinstate the old ideals which had made possible the Greek civilization. The allegorical method of the Stoics is an early example of this; by it they attempted to make the old myths and beliefs credible once more. But as time went on things grew worse, and other methods were tried. The last of these was an attempted revival of Platonic philosophy. It was no wonder that the men of the third century felt an especial attraction for Plato, for he had faced a situation much like theirs; they found a kindred mind in him, and the answers he gave to the great problems were taken up with eagerness by these disciples centuries later. Hence the rise of Neo-Platonism. But the Neo-Platonists did not confine themselves to taking over Plato; continuing the eclecticism which had marked Greek philosophy for several centuries, they also drew heavily upon Aristotle and the Stoics, while their immediate source of origin seems to have been Neo-Pythagoreanism. The influence of oriental speculation, and especially of gnosticism, was also marked.<sup>84</sup> In the main, however, Neo-Platonism was a continuation and revival of Platonism.

The school of the Neo-Platonists claimed Ammonius Saccas as its founder. This philosopher flourished in Alexandria about the year 200 A.D. He wrote nothing himself, but inspired a large number of pupils, who perpetuated the system which he had formulated. From his time until the end of the Greek world, Neo-Platonism was the predominating philosophy. During this period the school produced many writers, but among these the most eminent and the most

<sup>84</sup> For the question of the relations of Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism, see C. Schmidt, *Plotins Stellung zum Gnosticismus und kirchlichen Christentum*, Texte und Untersuchungen, N.F. iv, 1901.

typical was Ammonius's own pupil, Plotinus. His *Enneads* are the classical exposition of Neo-Platonic philosophy. In our search for the ascetic theory of the school, we cannot do better than turn to them.

Plotinus was born at Lykopolis in Egypt in 204 or 205. He early devoted himself to the study of philosophy at Alexandria, where he came in contact with Ammonius. In 242 he set out for Persia with the expedition of the Emperor Gordianus, to study the philosophy of the Persians and Hindus; but as the emperor was killed in Mesopotamia, the expedition was a failure, and Plotinus went to Antioch. Two years later he went to Rome, where he taught philosophy until his death in 269 or 270.

His pupil and biographer Porphyry tells us that he was so ashamed of having a body that he never spoke of his parents who had given him one.<sup>85</sup> In regard to his own ascetic life, we are told that "he never ate the flesh of domestic animals, much less of wild ones. He never bathed, but contented himself with having his body rubbed every day; when those who performed this office died of a plague which was then making great ravages, he dispensed with this, too, which interruption gave him quinsy."<sup>86</sup> Ascetic practices were common among Plotinus's pupils, too. Thus Rogotianus, a Roman senator, who applied himself to the study of philosophy under Plotinus, "became so detached from the things of this world that he abandoned his property, dismissed his domestics, and renounced his dignities. Having been named praetor, at the moment of entering upon his duties, when the lictors already awaited him, he determined not to go out or to exercise any of the functions of this office. He was not even willing to live in his house, but went to his friends' houses. There he ate and slept. He only took food one day in two, and by this regimen, after having been so afflicted with gout that he had

<sup>85</sup> Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

to be carried about in a chair, he regained his strength and stretched out his hands as easily as a mechanic, though he had been unable to make any use of them before. Plotinus had a great friendship for him; he praised him highly and held him up as a model to those who wished to become philosophers."<sup>87</sup> But the importance of Plotinus is not in what he did, but in what he taught. In his essays, a theory of asceticism is developed which represents the highest point attained by the Greeks in ascetical doctrine. As the essays were arranged by his pupil Porphyry according to subject matter, most of his remarks upon the subject are collected in the first *Ennead*, which treats of morals, though numerous passages in other parts of the work either amplify the theory or its metaphysical background.

Fundamental to the whole philosophy of Plotinus is his distinction between the intelligible and the sensible worlds. Like all idealists, Plotinus posited another world above the one with which his senses made him acquainted—a world known by the mind alone, but one which was, in the fullest sense of the term, the only real world. In this world he located all that was good or beautiful or intelligent, or that had being. It was the abode of the gods. It was complete and self-sufficient, had need of nothing, was the measure and end of all things, and was eternal; it was the only reality. But it was not all of a piece: like the Christian God, it was a trinity, having three hypostases or principles. The lowest of these was the Universal Soul, the second the Divine Intelligence, and the highest or first, the Good or the One. The One was the principle "upon which all depends, though it depends upon nothing itself." This first principle, the Good or Absolute Being or the One, or even God as it is sometimes called, was therefore the center upon which all things were focused, the end towards which all things strove, even the rest of the intelligible world which was lower in the hierarchy. "The

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

Universal Soul directs all its activity towards the Supreme intelligence and, in a way, lives only by it. Moving around it and about it according to the laws of harmony, the Universal Soul attached its regards upon it, and penetrating into its most intimate depths by contemplation, it thus beholds God himself. It is in this that the serene and happy life of the gods consists, which is a life where evil has no place.”<sup>88</sup> The first principle was the center of the universe, towards which all things were drawn by a sort of Platonic *ἔπος*; this first principle was the highest good.

Sharply opposed to this intelligible world was the sensible world, made up of material things. Just as the other world was the essence of the good, this sensible world was the essence of evil; as it was one, this was many; as it was Being, this was non-Being; as it was spiritual, this was material. This matter was the visible sign of the sensible world, as well as being the cause of its baseness. Plotinus’s denunciations of matter are numerous. “Matter does not possess being; it is truly said to be the non-being.”<sup>89</sup> “The nature of bodies, in so far as it partakes of matter, is an evil.”<sup>90</sup> “The cause of evil is therefore the presence of matter in sensible things.”<sup>91</sup> Matter is the mark of evil, but its essence is something else. “To determine better the nature of evil, we may think of it as the lack of measure as measure is concerned, as indetermination in regard to a goal, as the lack of form in relation to the principle which is creative of form, as eternal need as compared with that which is self-sufficient, as perpetual illimitation and mutability, and finally as absolute instability and indigence. That which is the subject of the form, the determination, the limitation, that

<sup>88</sup> *Enn.* I 8, 2. As there is no good English translation of Plotinus, this and the following extracts are based on the Greek text and the admirable French translation of Bouillet.

<sup>89</sup> I 8, 5.

<sup>90</sup> I 8, 5.

<sup>91</sup> I 8, 4.



which owes its ornaments to other things and has nothing good of its own, that which in relation to true beings is only a vain image, in a word, the essence of evil if such an essence of evil is possible, that is what reason obliges us to recognize as the first evil, as Evil-in-itself. The nature of bodies, in so far as it participates in matter, is evil; for it has a certain form, though this form is nothing real; moreover, it is deprived of life, as bodies corrupt one another mutually; they are in a perpetual flux, contrary to the immutable nature of essences; therefore they constitute the second evil.”<sup>92</sup> The sensible world, then, is a vain and inglorious and unreal one, and one can already foresee a teaching that it is to be shunned.

But the earth itself is not so bad after all: the Universal Soul is infused into it, and gives it a certain amount of beauty. In the essay on the *Three Hypostases*, there are many eloquent passages describing the beauty which the world thus receives. “The presence of the Soul has made an admirable whole out of that which was before an inert cadaver, earth and water, or rather shades of matter, non-being, an object of horror to the gods, as the poet says.”<sup>93</sup> “If the heaven, the sun and the stars are gods, this is due to the presence of the Soul. It is through this that we ourselves become something; a corpse is more vile than a dung-heap.”<sup>94</sup> “Without a soul, every body is but earth; it is the soul which gives the body its beauty.”<sup>95</sup> Elsewhere it is said that bodies “become beautiful by participating in a reason coming from God.”<sup>96</sup>

As this Universal Soul extends everywhere, there is really nothing absolutely without it, and therefore nothing absolutely and utterly base; everything which we see about us is

<sup>92</sup> I 8, 3-4.

<sup>93</sup> V 1, 2.

<sup>94</sup> V 1, 2.

<sup>95</sup> V 1, 2.

<sup>96</sup> I 6, 2.

a mixture of matter and soul, but the best example of this fusion of body and soul is man himself. Man is double, made up of a material body and a soul "which is a god which came from on high to dwell in us."<sup>97</sup> This soul, therefore, is in value far superior to anything which we possess: "strip it of all that envelops it, regard it in its purity, and you will see how precious is the essence of the soul, and how far superior it is to every body."<sup>98</sup> Such being the value of the soul, one should devote the greatest pains to its care, but owing to its very union with the body, the soul becomes impure.

"We would be correct in saying that the soul becomes ugly by mixing itself with the body and matter, in uniting itself to it, in inclining towards it. Ugliness of the soul consists in not being pure and unalloyed, as that of gold is being defiled with particles of earth."<sup>99</sup> Though the soul is never completely united with matter, but always separated somewhat from it, matter "attempts to penetrate into the place occupied by the soul, but all this place is sacred, for nothing is there deprived of the soul. Matter, in exposing itself to the rays of the soul, is illuminated by it, but cannot receive into itself the principle illuminating it. In fact, this latter does not allow of matter, though it be present, nor even see it, for it is evil. Matter darkens and enfeebles the light which is shed upon it, for it adds its own shadows. It gives the soul occasion for generation, by offering free access to itself: for if matter were not present, the soul would not approach it. To descend thus into matter is the fall of the soul."<sup>100</sup>

Here is the old, old story of the fall; men are now in their present unhappy state because they have fallen from the glory

<sup>97</sup> I 2, 6.

<sup>98</sup> V 1, 2.

<sup>99</sup> I 6, 5.

<sup>100</sup> I 3, 14; cf. I 8, 4.

that once was theirs. Time and time again it has been seen that this doctrine leads directly to asceticism: men should try to regain their primitive state, and to do so, they must give themselves over to all sorts of ascetic practices. But before turning to this, how did the fall come about? Plotinus is very explicit in one passage. "How does it come about that having a divine nature, being issue from God, souls do not realize this or their own value? The origin of their evil is audacity, generation, the original diversity, the desire to belong to no one but themselves."<sup>101</sup> As soon as they had tasted the pleasure of possessing an independent life, using freely of the power which they had to move, they advanced in the road leading them from their origin so that now they have arrived at such an estrangement from God that they do not know that they received their life from him."<sup>102</sup>

Fallen though it may be, however, the soul still remains related to the divine, and may return to it; the soul relates us to the divine, and opens up to us a means of advancing towards it. "Since the essence of the soul is so divine and precious, be persuaded that by it you may attain to God; with it, raise yourself to him. You do not have to seek him far away; there are not many intermediaries between him and you. To attain to him, take as your guide the most divine and loftiest part of your soul, the power from which it proceeds and by which it touches the intelligible world."<sup>103</sup> There is always a way, therefore, to return to the state from which the soul once fell, "to become again that which it was originally";<sup>104</sup> the soul supplies this means, but just how? A general answer is to be given first. "Life in a body is in itself an evil; but by virtue, the soul places itself in the

<sup>101</sup> "C'est-à-dire le desir qui a conduit les âmes à se séparer primitivement de Dieu et à s'unir aux corps."—Bouillet, Fr. tr. of Plot., interpolation, vol. iii, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> V 1, 1.

<sup>103</sup> V 1, 3.

<sup>104</sup> I 2, 6.

good, by not conserving this union with the body, but by separating itself from it."<sup>105</sup> But now what is virtue? and just what does he mean by separating the soul from the body?

"Since evil reigns here below and inevitably dominates in this world, and since the soul wishes to flee evil, it is necessary to flee from this world. But what is the way to do so? It is, according to Plato, to resemble God. We shall succeed by regulating ourselves according to justice, holiness, wisdom and virtue in general."<sup>106</sup> But by virtue he does not mean what he calls the civil virtues, prudence, courage or temperance. "These give us a certain resemblance with God, but it is through virtues of a superior order that we become completely like him."<sup>107</sup> The virtuous man will certainly exercise these inferior virtues, but he will transform them, and will not confine himself to these. He will "advance to the virtues of a superior order and form himself according to their rules. For example, he will not make temperance consist only in being moderate, but he will try to separate himself more and more from matter; he will not be contented with leading the life of a good man, as demanded by the civil virtues, but will aspire to still higher, to the life of the gods. It is they, and not merely good men whom we must resemble. To seek merely to resemble good men would be to make an image similar to another image. The assimilation which we prescribe consists in taking a superior being as model."<sup>108</sup> No, civil virtues are bodily affairs, and those who would seek the highest good should use the soul, for this is the part of man which approaches the nearest to God. "The soul, which by its nature is closer to the divine essence than the body, by that very fact participates in it to a greater degree."<sup>109</sup> It is these virtues of the soul

<sup>105</sup> I 7, 3.

<sup>106</sup> I 2, 1; cf. I 8, 7.

<sup>107</sup> I 2, 1.

<sup>108</sup> I 2, 7.

<sup>109</sup> I 2, 2.

which one must cultivate, if he is to approach God. Plotinus's interpretation of the story of Hercules, the patron god of the Cynics and Stoics, well illustrates his thought upon this point. "Hercules's virtue was active, and because of his great qualities he was judged worthy of being admitted to the rank of the gods; but as he possessed the active virtue only, and not the contemplative virtue, he could not be admitted wholly into heaven; therefore, while a part of him is in heaven, a part is also in Hades."<sup>110</sup>

But what was the nature of this true virtue? how was one to learn it? Plotinus says that "to convert souls to God, to elevate them to the Supreme Principle, to the One, to the First, one must reason with them in two ways. In the first place, he must show the baseness of the objects which they now esteem, and then he must remind them of the origin and dignity of the soul."<sup>111</sup> To these two points, the insignificance of external things and the infinite value and dignity of the soul, Plotinus gives much attention.

In a long passage he sets forth in veritably Stoic terms the truth that happiness does not depend upon external things.<sup>112</sup> "The wise man will not make his fate depend upon the happiness of others."<sup>113</sup> "It is the duty of virtue to improve upon the ordinary state of human nature and to lead it to that which is most beautiful, elevating itself above the opinion of the vulgar. It is beautiful not to cede to that which the vulgar ordinarily regard as evils."<sup>114</sup> In general, "the world offers a spectacle of injustice and disorder, for our nature is mortal, and we dwell in an inferior place."<sup>115</sup> The sensible world is distinctly inferior and its goods should therefore not be sought after.

<sup>110</sup> I 1, 12.

<sup>111</sup> V 1, 1.

<sup>112</sup> I 4, 6ff.

<sup>113</sup> I 4, 7.

<sup>114</sup> I 4, 8.

<sup>115</sup> I 8, 6.

"Though the vulgar man may be rich, beautiful, great, and though he may command all others, thus enjoying all the terrestrial benefits, it is not necessary to envy him for the deceitful pleasures which he derives from these advantages. The wise man will not possess them at first, perhaps, but if he does, he will diminish them of his own free will, if he has the care for himself which he should have; by a voluntary negligence, he will weaken and sully the advantages of the body; he will renounce his dignities; though preserving the health of his body, he will not desire to be entirely exempt from illness and suffering; if he does not know these evils, he will wish their acquaintance in his youth; but when he has arrived at old age, he will not wish to be bothered any more, either by pains or by pleasures, or anything else, sad or agreeable, which is relative to the body, so as not to be obliged to give it his attention."<sup>116</sup> "In fact, it would be denying the very essence of happiness to regard exterior objects as the desire of a virtuous man."<sup>117</sup> "A man cannot be wise, nor consequently happy, as long as he has not yet succeeded in ridding himself of these vain notions, has not completely transformed himself, is not sure of being protected from all evil; it is only then that he can live without being agitated by any fear."<sup>118</sup>

On the other hand is the soul, opposed to the material world, and without its failings; it is to the cultivation of this that the virtuous man will devote his attention. As the activity of the soul is associated with that of the intelligence, care of the soul consists in developing the intellect, and the life of the soul is the intellectual life. "The perfect, veritable and real life is in the intelligence."<sup>119</sup> "A man has the perfect life when he possesses, in addition to the sensitive life, reason and veritable intelligence."<sup>120</sup> "Reduced to intelligence, the soul sees its beauty increase; in fact, its proper beauty is the intelligence with its ideas; it is when it is united with the

<sup>116</sup> I 4, 14.

<sup>117</sup> I 4, 11.

<sup>118</sup> I 4, 15.

<sup>119</sup> I 4, 3.

<sup>120</sup> I 4, 4.

intelligence that the soul is really isolated from all the rest."<sup>121</sup> "Thus intelligence is ours, but in the sense that the soul is intelligent: for us, the intellectual life is a superior life. The soul enjoys this life when it thinks of intelligible beings, or when the intelligence is active in us. The intelligence is at once a part of ourselves and a superior thing to which we raise ourselves."<sup>122</sup> We make use of this superior principle when we direct the medium part of our being either towards the superior world or the inferior world.<sup>123</sup> "Men triumph over evil by the aid of those faculties which are not engaged in matter."<sup>124</sup> It is this intellectual life which unites men to God.<sup>125</sup>

The man who has a care for his soul will therefore seek to lead the intellectual life; the virtuous man is the one who does so. The virtuous man or sage is recognizable, therefore, by two qualities: his serenity, which is the result of his not caring for external and transitory goods, and his contemplative life, by which he raises his soul to God. "The virtuous man is therefore always serene, calm, satisfied; if he is really virtuous, his state cannot be troubled by any of the things which we call evils."<sup>126</sup> This serenity is a good thing in itself, but its greatest value is that it makes possible the contemplative life.

"It is necessary that the soul contemplate the Universal Soul; now in order to raise itself to this contemplation, the soul must be worthy of it by its nobility, it must be emancipated from error and freed from the objects which fascinate the regard of vulgar souls, it must be plunged into a profound meditation and must calm not only the agitation of the body which envelops it and the tumult of the senses, but also everything which surrounds it.

<sup>121</sup> I 6, 6.

<sup>122</sup> I 2, 1.

<sup>123</sup> I 1, 11,

<sup>124</sup> I 8, 5.

<sup>125</sup> I, 2, 4; 8, 7; 4, 16; V 1, 6; 1, 11; etc.

<sup>126</sup> I 4, 12.

Then may all be calm, the earth, the sea, the air and heaven itself."<sup>127</sup>

This contemplation is the highest activity which the soul can perform. "The good of the soul is to remain united to the intelligence to which it is sister; its evil is to abandon itself to contrary things. After having purified the soul, therefore, it is necessary to unite it to God: to unite it to God, it is necessary to turn it towards him. . . . The virtue of the soul does not consist in this conversion, but in what it obtains by this conversion. But what does it obtain?—the intuition of the intelligible world."<sup>128</sup> When carried to its extreme, this contemplation results in ecstasy, and thus ecstasy is the highest good possible for man, for it is union with God. When this is achieved, every lower activity of the soul, and even thought itself disappears, for the soul is then united to something which is above thought; it has no movement or life or opinion or consciousness; it is not even any longer a soul or a self, but a pure and motionless rest in God; it is raised above beauty and virtue and knowledge into a state of ecstasy, of resignation into the Eternal, which can only be compared to drunkenness or the insanity of love.<sup>129</sup> Thus the soul is united to the First Principle; God not only appears to it, but God and the soul are no longer two, but an inseparable unity; the soul becomes pure light, free from all heavy things, it becomes God, or rather, realizes that it is God.<sup>130</sup> This state is to be attained only by a renunciation of all things and prayer. "Let us first invoke God himself, not by pronouncing words, but by elevating our soul to him in prayer; now the only way to pray is to advance solitarily towards the One who is solitary. To contemplate the One, it is necessary to withdraw into one's own conscience, as though into a temple, and to remain there

<sup>127</sup> V 4, 12.

<sup>128</sup> I 2, 4.

<sup>129</sup> V 3, 1; 8, 11; VI 7, 35; 9, 10.

<sup>130</sup> VI 9, 10; V 8, 11; VI 7, 34–35; 9, 9–11.



tranquil and in ecstasy.”<sup>131</sup> Porphyry tells us that his master entered into this ecstasy four times during the six years of their acquaintance.<sup>132</sup>

The ascetic character of Plotinus’s philosophy is already obvious. The end and aim which every man who does not wish to be called “vulgar” should hold before himself is to turn away from all the things of the world, to separate himself from all material things and especially from his body, and to seek union with the divine. His philosophy is permeated with a longing and striving after better things, after self-improvement, but these better things are not things of this world at all, and the criterion of self-improvement is detachment from the world. “Plotinus’s moral system has a predominatingly negative character,” said Zeller.<sup>133</sup> But in order to make the nature of this separation of soul and body, and of this striving for superior things, more clear, let us quote, in closing, a few more passages in which these subjects are dealt with more explicitly.

“That which constitutes a man, and especially a virtuous man, is not the compound of soul and body; as is proven by the power which the soul has of separating itself from the body, and despising what are ordinarily called goods.”<sup>134</sup>

“Evils cannot be abolished. Then how can one flee them? It is not by changing place, says Plato, but by acquiring virtue and separating oneself from the body; for that is also separating oneself from matter, since whatever is attached to the body is also attached to matter. Plato also explains what it is to be separated from the body, or not to be separated from it, and finally what it is to be near the gods: it is to be united to intelligible objects, for it is to these objects that immortality belongs.”<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> V 1, 6.

<sup>132</sup> Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 23. For Plotinus’s views in regard to this ecstasy, see Zeller, *Philos. d. Griechen*, III 2, pp. 611–19; Drews, *Plotin*, pp. 271–90; for contemplation, Drews, pp. 269–71.

<sup>133</sup> Zeller, III 2, p. 599.

<sup>134</sup> I 4, 14.

<sup>135</sup> I 8, 7.

"Happiness is not found in the life of the vulgar. Plato is right in saying that one must quit the earth to rise to the Good, and that to become wise and happy, one must turn his regard towards the Good alone, seek to become like it and to lead a life in conformity with its. As a matter of fact, this should suffice to the wise man to attain his end; and he should no longer attach any value to other things, which are mere changes in space, and can add nothing to happiness."<sup>136</sup>

"The soul is evil, in so far as it is associated with the body and participates in its passions and opinions; it becomes better, and enters into possession of virtue, only when, instead of following the body, it thinks by itself (which is true thought and constitutes prudence), when it ceases to share in its passions (which is temperance), when it does not fear being separated from the body (which is courage), and finally, when reason and intelligence command and are obeyed (which is justice). Without danger of deceiving ourselves, we may say that the condition of a soul thus regulated, a soul thinking of intelligible things and remaining calm, is what is really resemblance with God: for that which is pure is divine, and such is the nature of divine action that whatever initiates it already possesses wisdom."<sup>137</sup>

"What shall we make real temperance consist in, if not in refusing to attach oneself to the pleasures of the body, and in fleeing them as though they were impure and proper only for an impure being? Does not courage consist in not fearing death, which is nothing other than separation of soul and body? Then how could he who wishes to isolate himself from the body fear death? Grandeur of soul is merely despising the things here below. Finally, real prudence is thought, which, being detached from earth, raises the soul to the intelligible world. A purified soul becomes a form, a reason, an incorporeal and intelligible essence; it belongs wholly to the divinity, in whom is the source of the beautiful and all the qualities which have an affinity with it."<sup>138</sup>

"The soul separates itself from the body when, abandoning the various places where it was spread, it retires into itself; when it

<sup>136</sup> I 4, 16.

<sup>137</sup> I 2, 3.

<sup>138</sup> I 6, 6.

becomes entirely foreign to the passions; when it allows the body only those pleasures which are necessary, or adapted to cure it from its pains, to relieve it of its fatigues, or to prevent it from becoming importune; when it becomes insensible to sufferings, or, if that is not within its power, when it supports them patiently and diminishes them by taking no part in them; when it appeases anger as much as possible and even suppresses it entirely, if it can, but if it cannot, it does not participate in it at all, but leaves to the animal nature all thoughtless passions, while reducing them and weakening them as much as possible; when it is absolutely immune from fear, having nothing more to be afraid of; when it suppresses every sudden movement, except the natural warnings of approaching danger. Obviously the purified soul should desire nothing disgraceful: in eating and drinking, it will seek only the satisfaction of a need, while remaining a stranger to it; no more will it seek out the pleasures of love, or if it does desire them, it will not go beyond that which nature demands, resisting every thoughtless passion, and not going beyond the involuntary impulses of the imagination. In a word, the soul will be pure of all these passions and will even wish to purify the irrational part of our being in such a way as to preserve it from emotions, or at least to diminish the number and intensity of these emotions, and to appease them by its presence.”<sup>139</sup>

Such was the asceticism taught by Plotinus; it may be taken as the clearest expression of what was taught by the entire Neo-Platonic school. But it must not be thought that with Plotinus, Greek speculation came to an end; on the contrary, the Neo-Platonic school continued to exist for over two hundred years after his time. His own pupil Porphyry continued to teach Neo-Platonism and asceticism after him; Porphyry was succeeded by Jamblichus, who in his turn had many pupils. Finally, in the fifth century, came Proclus, the last of the Greek philosophers worthy of mention. The Neo-Platonic tradition continued down to the end of the Greek world, therefore, and was the last that the Greeks had

to say on the subject of philosophy—though by no means the best. However, the followers of Plotinus added little that was new to his system: the fundamental propositions of the intelligible and sensible worlds, the dual nature of man, and the desirability of devoting all one's efforts to striving towards the intelligible world, were retained, and continued to be the guiding principles of the philosophy. Nevertheless, after Plotinus, the expressions of this philosophy became ever weaker and more chaotic and confused, and more and more mingled with superstitions and non-Greek elements. The leaders of the school came from all parts of the world and were not Greeks by blood at all, which fact reacted visibly upon their thought; in the first chapter of the present study we saw also that the revival of primitive Greek superstitions at this time was so great that Miss Harrison has been able to quote Porphyry and Jamblichus to illustrate ideas which she found behind the very early rites of the Greeks. The subsequent development of Neo-Platonism was merely a degeneration and a watering-out of the thought of Plotinus. In the later period, too, Neo-Platonism took on more and more a distinctly religious coloring; this was particularly the case after Jamblichus.<sup>140</sup> In the course of this development, asceticism came to receive a constantly increasing attention from the followers of the school: a little must therefore be said in closing in regard to the nature of this ascetical thought.

Porphyry continued to teach the radical dualism of soul and body which his master had taught, and continued the teaching that the soul was what united one to God: *omne corpus esse fugiendum, ut anima possit beata permanere cum Deo*, he is reported to have said.<sup>141</sup> Love of God and love of body are two incompatible things;<sup>142</sup> fondness for one

<sup>140</sup> Zeller, III 2, p. 714: "Der Neuplatonismus durch ihn zuerst ganz entschieden in den Dienst der Religion trat, und aus einer philosophischen Lehre zu einer theologischen Doctrin wurde. Das gleiche bestätigt aber auch die Geschichte seiner Schule, so weit sie uns bekannt ist."

<sup>141</sup> Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, X 29.

<sup>142</sup> *ad Marc.* 14.

necessarily excludes desire for the goods of the other; he who seeks higher things must renounce the pleasures of the body and the desire for them, and by philosophical endeavours loosen the band by which the soul is chained to the body.<sup>143</sup> All sensuous pleasures are to be resolutely repressed; even moderate sexual indulgence is forbidden,<sup>144</sup> as are the theater, dancing, horse-races, and the like.<sup>145</sup> Especial emphasis is laid upon abstinence from flesh food, to which subject he devoted a whole treatise; it would be a good thing, he thinks, if we could do without any food at all, but since we must have it, we should take only that which is simplest and most innocent;<sup>146</sup> asceticism must be expressed not only by a mental withdrawal from worldly interests, but also by external acts which chastise the body. For the body is at best merely a garment of the soul, which one should lay aside if he is to win the victor's crown; it is not only base, a hindrance to him, and irreconcilable with higher aspirations, but it is also positively injurious, polluting one through the demons which adhere to it.<sup>147</sup> Thus pollution again appears in an important rôle in Greek thought; as a matter of fact, purifying virtues (*καθαρτικά*) are second in Porphyry's hierarchy of virtues. First are political virtues; then the purifying virtues by which advance is made, which consist in freeing oneself from earthly things, and which end in apathy; third comes the positive corollary of these virtues, namely, the raising of the soul to God; and finally are the "paradigmatic" virtues, those of the *νοῦς* itself.<sup>148</sup> Though purifying virtue is not the highest, it is, nevertheless, according to Porphyry, the one most essential for men, for it is necessarily preliminary to all the others, and their foundation.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>143</sup> *de Abst.* I 33.

<sup>144</sup> *de Abst.* IV 20; *Sent.* 34.

<sup>145</sup> *de Abst.* I 33

<sup>146</sup> *de Abst.* IV 20.

<sup>147</sup> *de Abst.* I 31; II 46.

<sup>148</sup> *Sent.* 34.

<sup>149</sup> *Sent.* 34.

Thus asceticism, world-denial and world-flight become the essential elements of a moral life.

Asceticism holds an equally important place in the system of Jamblichus. Like the other Neo-Platonists, he held to the dualism of the intelligible and sensible worlds, located the soul midway between the two, and spoke of methods of "purification" by which it might rise to the higher. Just as the soul might rise to the rank of the angels, it might also fall to the place of demons; in fact, the body is once more taught to be the outward and visible sign of the fact that the soul has fallen from a former loftier abode. But Jamblichus added nothing new; his ethical system is merely a popular philosophy in the spirit of his school.<sup>150</sup>

Thus Greek philosophy gradually faded away. As time went on, Greek thought became vaguer and vaguer, and more and more childish and superstitious, and cared less and less for the world of the senses, giving all its attention to the intelligible world and denouncing such things as marrying and giving in marriage or even eating and drinking, until, like the grasshoppers in Plato's fable quoted above, it "forgot and died, and went to the Muses in heaven." But before it passed away, most of it that was of value had been assimilated by the Christians. After the third century, the intellectual leadership of the Greek world was in their hands; they then took over all that Hellas had to give which was good; but after that time, Hellas contributed nothing new. With Neo-Platonism, therefore, the field which we marked out for our study has been covered.

<sup>150</sup> Zeller, III 2, p. 712: "Im übrigen enthalten die zahlreichen Ueberbleibsel seiner ethischen Abhandlungen (in Strobäus' Florilegium) kaum etwas anders, als eine popularphilosophische Moral im Geist seiner Schule."

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, the gradual development of Greek ascetical thought has been traced from the early rites of purification through abstinence, up to Platonic and Neo-Platonic idealism. The existence of these primitive rites in early Greece has been established; it has been shown how the Orphics, in pre-Socratic times, while attempting to interpret these rites, developed theories in regard to a dual world, marked respectively by body and soul, taught the infinite superiority of the latter, and urged men to chastise their sinful bodies for the good of their souls; Plato accepted this dualistic theory, and made it the basis of his philosophy. Thus, the fundamental view of the world which is at the bottom of Greek (and Christian) asceticism was clearly stated by the time of Plato; his successors had nothing to add to this. Nevertheless, the development of asceticism during the age following Plato was enormous. It has been shown how, beginning in the first century B.C., a wave of asceticism swept over the whole Greek world, which became more and more powerful as time went on. World-flight and other-worldliness were the characteristic features of the thought of decaying Greece; they were one of the important contributions of Hellas to Christianity. This has been shown, but before the present study is brought to a close, a few general remarks bearing upon the transference of this asceticism into Christianity must be made.

In the first place, it should be pointed out that this study of Greek asceticism has further illustrated the truth of the remark already made by others that asceticism is not the relatively rare phenomenon which some have imagined it, but that on the contrary, it is an essential element of every reli-

gion.<sup>1</sup> According to the classic views of Greek life, the Greek religion, if any, should have been free from such tendencies, but it has been shown that even here, asceticism played a considerable rôle. Of course, these tendencies varied in intensity at different times, but they were never wholly lacking. The explanation of this fact is to be found in the nature and function of religion itself. Every society has certain collective ideas and ideals in regard to life and the world upon which its whole social superstructure is built, and which are its characterizing feature; if these ideals lose the support of men, the society itself will perish. It is the function of religion to inspire men with these ideals. Now, these ideals always require that a man should not devote his entire attention to his own material gain, but should have some regard for other things of a more distinctly social nature; these are called "higher" things—things such as truth, justice, or the glory of God, to cite a few common examples. If religion is successful in its function, then, it will lead men to forsake their material gain sometimes for these higher things, and a very common method for teaching them to do this is to insist upon the lesser value of these material gains. It is inevitable, moreover, that in every society some persons will exaggerate this teaching and thus become ascetics. It is for this reason that asceticism is to be found in all known religions. In the case of Christianity, it existed to a certain extent from the very start, but during the early centuries these initial germs were developed to an enormous degree. It is in this that Hellenic influence is observable, for at first the asceticism was largely of Jewish or Gnostic origin.

In the second place, a few words must be said upon the determining causes of the development of asceticism. Little attention has been devoted to this problem in the preceding pages, for an effort has been made to limit the discussion to

<sup>1</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, pp. 316ff. (Eng. tr.).



the question of what Hellenic asceticism was, not why it was; nevertheless a few words have necessarily been devoted to this second question as well. It has been shown that asceticism seems to increase as social and economic conditions in the world grow worse. When the world is no longer able to please men, and they are dissatisfied with it, they frequently turn to asceticism. In every social state there will be some persons who do this, but in evil days, these people will be particularly numerous: as a society fails and fades away, asceticism will become more noticeable. Asceticism has thus been spoken of as an "old man's philosophy," and such it is to an eminent, though not to an exclusive degree. The reason for this fact is obvious: the decay of society is attributed to a falling away from the old ideals, so many persons try to save the situation by making unusual efforts to remain true to them. Thus the decadent Athens of the fourth century produced Plato, who eloquently urged a return to the old ideals, even at the expense of the body. This same Athens produced the Cynics, who differed greatly from Plato both in the spirit and the letter of their teaching, but who agreed with him that higher things should be sought at the expense of the body. Inversely, we find that during the prosperous period following the conquests of Alexander, asceticism was reduced to a minimum. But social conditions in the Roman Empire, and particularly in the eastern part of it, were especially well adapted to the production of ascetic ideals, and the result was the great ascetic movement described in the last three chapters. In spite of the many blessings brought by the Romans in the form of stable government and the like, society was rushing to ruin. Though it was by no means the only one, still it cannot be denied that one of the causes of this decay was the sensual indulgence of the people; they no longer remained true to their old ideals, nor did they find newer or better ones. It became obvious that if society was to continue to exist, men would have to care less for their bodily

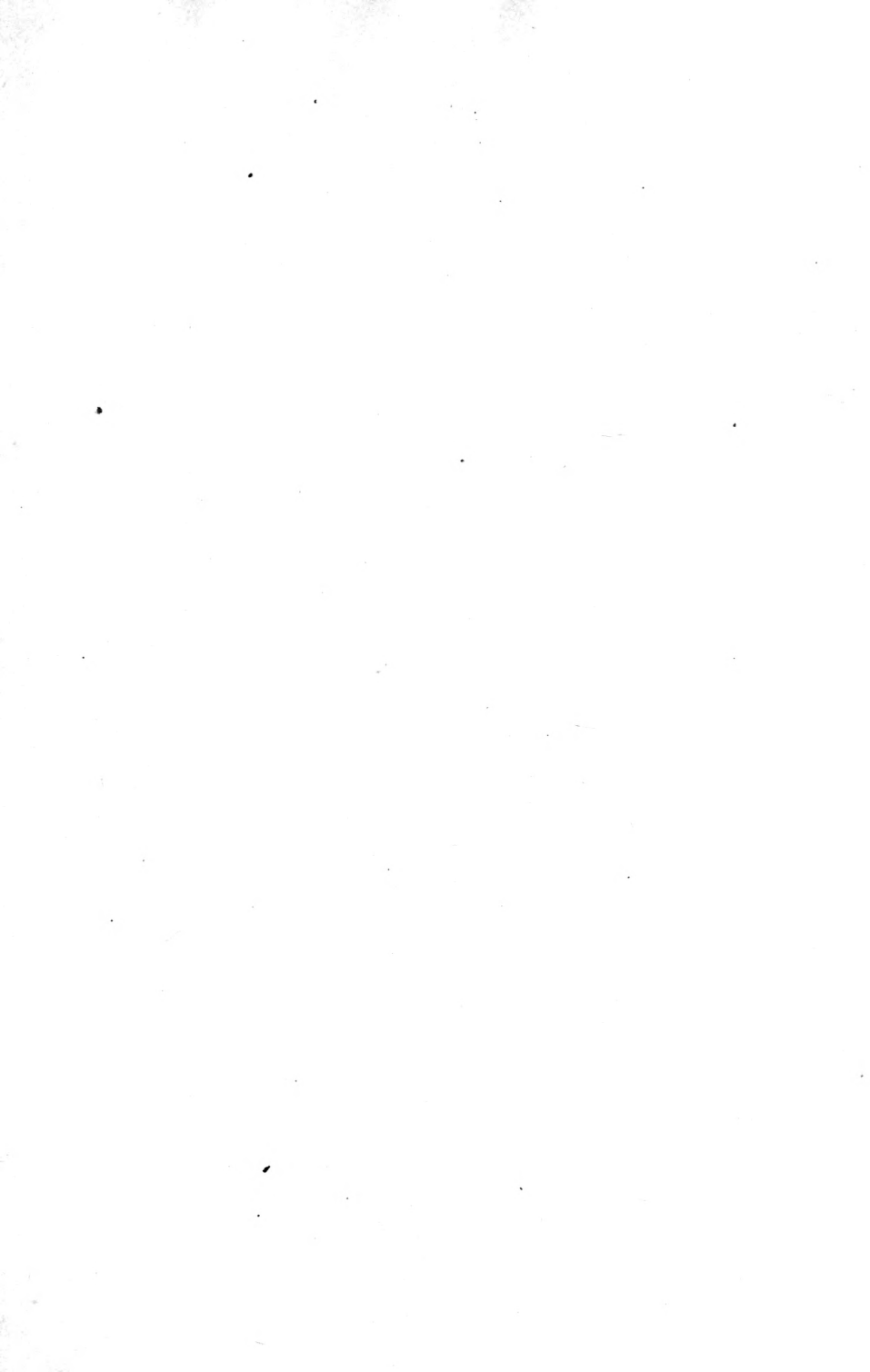
pleasures and more for ideal things. Hence came the rise of asceticism. Now it was into this world that Christianity, with many other new religions, entered, bringing a message of redemption; but the only form of redemption then possible was through an ascetic idealism. It was only because it presented just such an asceticism that Christianity was able to save civilization.

It therefore seems as though Christianity had been predestined to an ascetic character; not only did it need to have that quota of asceticism which is common to all religions, but also the unusually strenuous asceticism demanded by the world which it entered. It is certain that the early Christians, in adapting their religion to the needs of their age, did give it such a nature. But what were the sources from which they derived their ascetic ideals? The present study has attempted to present some of them, though not by any means all of them. How did the early Christians draw upon these sources? This is a question for another study, and is beyond the range of the present one. What we have attempted to do is to present some of these sources—the ascetic features of the Greek world which Christianity entered—and thus prepare the way for a study of this larger question.

## VITA

I, Joseph Ward Swain, was born at Yankton, South Dakota, on December 16, 1891, the eldest son of Henry Huntington and Myra (Olmstead) Swain. I spent my childhood and youth, and received my early education in Dillon, Montana. After spending two years in Beloit College, at Beloit, Wisconsin, I entered Columbia College as a junior in 1910. I received the A.B. degree from Columbia in 1912, and at that time was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa society. I was awarded the Chanler Historical Prize for an essay on "Calhoun and the Annexation of Texas." The following year I spent in graduate study at Harvard University, from which institution I received the degree of A.M. in 1913. From 1913 to 1915 I was in Europe, studying especially at the University of Paris, but also carrying on private studies at Leipzig and London. During both winters I was regularly enrolled at the "École Pratique des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses," at the University of Paris; at the end of the first year I was promoted to the grade of "élève titulaire," and at the end of the second I presented a dissertation entitled "Hebrew and Early Christian Asceticism." Owing to the turmoils of war, the faculty have not yet passed upon this dissertation, but in case it is accepted, I shall receive the grade of "élève diplômé" of the section. The year 1915-16 I spent in graduate study at Columbia. I have translated into English the work of Professor Émile Durkheim, of Paris, entitled "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life" (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915, pp. xi + 456).





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